











HIDDEN DEPTHS.

*C. S. Benson*

EDINBURGH : PRINTED BY THOMAS CONSTABLE,

FOR

EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS.

LONDON, . . . HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.

CAMBRIDGE, . . . MACMILLAN AND CO.

DUBLIN, . . . M<sup>c</sup>GLASHAN AND GILL.

GLASGOW, . . . JAMES MACLEHOSIE.


# HIDDEN DEPTHS

*'VERITAS EST MAJOR CHARITAS'*

VOLUME FIRST

EDINBURGH  
EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS

1866.



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## PREFACE.

*This book is not a work of fiction, in the ordinary acceptation of the term. If it were, it would be worse than useless ; for the hidden depths, of which it reveals a glimpse, are no fit subjects for a romance, nor ought they to be opened up to the light of day for purposes of mere amusement. But truth must always have a certain power, in whatever shape it may appear ; and though all did not occur precisely as here narrated, it is nevertheless actual truth which speaks in these records.*



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## CHAPTER I.

### THE DEPÔT.

THERE must be a something remarkable, generally speaking, in the appearance of an individual who attracts attention in the crowded thoroughfares of a large city. Yet it is a noticeable fact, that if, amongst the numbers hurrying to and fro, there is one person whose mind is fixed with a determined concentration of the will on any given object, that energy of purpose, silent and secret as it is, will make itself felt on the passers-by with a power of which they are themselves unconscious. Such was the case one bright spring day in a wide street in Seamouth, where a young woman, walking rapidly along, was observed with a vague curiosity by all who approached her. There was nothing in her dress or appearance to justify the attention she excited. She was handsome, certainly, but her beauty was evidently dependent on that evanescent brilliancy of youth and health, which our neighbours term '*la beauté du diable*;' and there were already indications on her strongly-

marked features of the coarseness which usually takes the place of these transitory charms amongst women of the lower orders. Her dress was chiefly remarkable for its costly material, which ill befitted the station in life to which she clearly belonged, but its elaborate display of colours was arranged with a certain picturesque adjustment, which heightened the effect of her dark eyes and bright complexion. It was, however, the expression of her face which caused every one to gaze at her as they passed along; for it must have been some desperate purpose which had drawn her forehead into such a frown of stern resolution, and lit up that lurid fire in her eyes, while the set teeth and quivering nostril told unmistakably of a fierce internal struggle. So strong was the impression of passionate energy which seemed to flash from her convulsed yet rigid countenance, that several persons stopped to watch her as she hastened on, clearing the way before her, as if determined not to allow anything to turn her from her course either to the right hand or to the left.

To her it evidently mattered nothing whether she were observed or not, and she only noticed the numbers passing round her by grasping more tightly some papers which she held in her clenched hand. A child came across her path, but she would not stay her impetuous course

one moment to let it pass, and appeared not even to hear its sharp cry as it fell on the pavement; then a carriage came at full speed down the street she was crossing, but she paid no attention whatever to the shouts of the coachman, who called to her to stand back till he passed, and he could only save her from being trampled under the horses' feet by throwing them on their haunches just as the pole touched her shoulder; other obstructions met her in the crowded way, but still she never so much as turned her head, and held on her course, breathless and determined, till she reached the gate of the court-yard in which the Emigrant Depôt is placed.

This building is used for various purposes, and amongst other, for the shelter of the soldiers' wives who are sent to their husbands in India at the expense of the Government, and who generally remain at the depôt for a few days previous to their embarkation. It was occupied, at the time of which we speak, by the women belonging to two regiments stationed at Lucknow, and they were to sail the following day in the 'Hero,' which was also to take out Colonel Courtenay of the —th Regiment, returning from leave, and a few other officers and men.

The principal door stood open, and the young woman

walked straight in, and advanced into the first room on the ground-floor which presented itself before her. It proved to be the kitchen, where a little man with a merry, comical face was presiding over various caldrons, and brandishing a huge ladle in his hand. She went up to him, and laid her hand on his shoulder so suddenly that he started violently.

‘I want to go to India!’ she said, in a voice harsh from suppressed agitation.

‘Well! and if you do, you need not make a fellow jump sky-high for that,’ said the aggrieved cook.

‘Here are my papers,’ she continued, in the same hoarse tone.

‘I don’t want them, bless you! There, you go up these stairs’—he pointed to the right—‘and you will find some one to take them.’

Instantly she turned and was gone, almost before he had finished his sentence. He looked after her for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders, and turned round with an air of paternal tenderness to a huge piece of beef, which had been occupying his attention when she interrupted him.

Meantime, up the creaking wooden stair went that determined step, and on into a small room on the first landing, of which the door stood wide open. Here a

non-commissioned officer was seated behind a small table covered with papers ; a large book lay open before him, and he was engaged in entering into it the name of a soldier's wife, who had just arrived with her two children to embark next day. A private was in attendance at the door, and as he saw the young woman draw near, he signed to her to wait till the other was disposed of. She did so, standing rigid as a statue. On her right hand was an immense room, the temporary abode of some hundreds of women and children, whose voices were coming from it in shrill confusion ; but she did not seem even to be conscious of their vicinity, and remained with her eyes fixed on vacancy till her turn came for inspection. At length the certificates of the soldier's wife were pronounced ' All right,' and she was passed on to join the others. Then the girl went forward, and laid her papers silently on the table before the sergeant. He took up the printed form authorizing embarkation, which he knew so well, and glanced at the place where the names of the women and their absent husbands were inserted. Those marked on the girl's paper were ' Mary Anne Reed,' wife of ' James Reed,' private of the —th Regiment, stationed at Lucknow. The sergeant read them two or three times, then looked up keenly at the young woman.

‘Are you sure this is your certificate?’ he asked.

‘Quite sure,’ she answered doggedly.

‘In that case,’ he said coolly, ‘Jim Reed has two wives, which is one too many for a living man, let alone a dead one, as he is at this present time.’

A visible tremor shook the girl from head to foot, yet she stood firm.

‘These are my papers, and they are right,’ she said, articulating with difficulty.

The sergeant turned to the private—‘Smith, did I not send you to the station yesterday to meet James Reed’s wife, and tell her that the last mail brought the news of his death?’

‘You did, sir.’

‘Is this the woman?’

‘No more like her than I am, sir! She was a thin little woman, with a pale face, and this here’—he paused and looked at the girl; ‘why, this here is a stunner!’

‘She passed herself off for his wife, but she was not so really,’ said the young woman.

‘Not his wife!’ exclaimed Smith, with a burst of indignation; ‘I should like to see any one venture to say that who saw her face yesterday when I told her he was gone. She looked at me as if she thought the world was come to an end. Then all of a sudden she

gave such a shriek—I can hear it now. “My Jim! my Jim!” she cried out, and after a minute she said, quite low, “O Lord, I wish I were dead!” and down she dropped on the ground as if she were shot. I shan’t forget it in a hurry. She had friends with her who knew right well she was his wife; and they took her back, poor creature, the way she came.’

The girl’s hands worked convulsively, but still she did not move.

‘Come, come, my girl, this is no use,’ said the sergeant; ‘if you could prove you were his wife it would do no good; the man’s dead and gone,—you can’t go out to him.’

‘There are two James Reeds,’ she said in her hoarse voice.

‘Now, look here,’ he answered angrily, ‘there is not the least use in your attempting to gammon me, my girl. Do you suppose I don’t know the name of every man in the regiment rather better than you do? There is but one James Reed, and he died of cholera two months ago. You were not his wife, and what is more, I don’t believe you ever called any honest man husband.’

‘And I can tell you how she came by these papers,’ exclaimed a woman, rushing triumphantly into the

room with all that satisfaction beaming on her face which it affords some of us in this world to hunt down our fellow-creatures. She had been on her way to the kitchen from the other room when the altercation commenced, and, true to her sex, she had remained listening to it with eager curiosity. ‘I was at the station when Mrs. Reed was told of her poor man’s death,—you remember me helping you, no doubt, Mr. Smith?’ she continued, appealing to the private, who nodded, with a look which seemed to imply that the recollection was not particularly agreeable, and she went on giving her evidence after the manner of women. ‘I helped to carry her out into the air, poor woman. I could feel for her, sir, for I am a wife and a mother myself, and a widow too,—leastways I buried my first, eight years come Michaelmas; and a great brute he was to me, and seven children I’ve had—’

‘Well, well, what do you know about the papers, Mrs. Miller?’ said the sergeant, cutting her short.

‘I knows this, sir. Mrs. Reed had them in her hand when she fell in a faint in the waiting-room, and when she came to herself on the platform she had not got them, and says she to me, says she, “Would you please to look for my papers, ma’am; perhaps they will be wanted?” and I went, sir, for she could no more have



walked than a new-born babe; and I know what the 'sterics are myself: I am very subject to them, sir, and a drop of peppermint—'

'But the papers, Mrs. Miller?'

'Well, sir, you do flurry me so, sir. Well, I went back and looked for them everywhere. I looked in the gentlemen's hats as was standing on the table, and in the coal-scuttle, and everywhere I could think of, and nothing could I see of them; but this here young woman was stooping down at one of the seats when I came in, and I saw her stuff something into her pocket, and off she went out of the station, and I thought no harm,—bless you, I thinks no evil of no one; never,—but she had them safe enough, I'll warrant—a hussy!'

'What answer have you to make to that charge, young woman?' said the sergeant, looking sternly at her. Her lips moved, but she did not speak, and she remained gazing in his face with such a look of wild misery in her eyes, that he was touched in spite of himself. He turned to her accuser—

'Well, Mrs. Miller, I have no doubt you are right, and I am much obliged to you; and now, will you please to go down? I see some other persons waiting to give in their papers.'

She opened her mouth, but the proposed remark was

lost to this record by the silent eloquence of Smith, who put his hand to her elbow and quietly turned her out of the room. She muttered a protest against this summary ejection, and then hastened down stairs to enlighten the cook on the extent of the young woman's iniquity, and her own sagacity.

The sergeant then turned to the unhappy girl, and said, not unkindly, 'Now, my girl, you see this won't do. I have no doubt you have a sweetheart in India, and it is natural you should wish to go to him, but we can't let you cheat Her Majesty's Government. You must find some other way to go out—'

'Or get another sweetheart,' said Smith, in an oracular tone, and, at a sign from the sergeant, he drew her from the room with much more gentleness than he had shown to the acute Mrs. Miller. He then turned from her and proceeded to usher in some other women who had arrived in the meantime, leaving her standing close to the door of the large room where the women and children were assembled.

The girl looked in upon the noisy crowd with a wistful, longing gaze, and saw that, from their numbers and the size of the room, an interloper might easily remain undetected, and with a sudden determination she walked in quietly and took her way to the farther

corner of the apartment. The sole furniture it contained was a long row of tables placed near the wall, with a bench on either side, and, at meal-times, when a certain amount of regularity prevailed, it might have been seen that each of these tables was allotted to a fixed number of women, who were not allowed to interfere with their neighbours. She went on to the most remote corner, where two women were engaged in clearing away the remains of their dinner, while several others were sitting round, with their children scrambling at their feet and fighting for the fragments that had fallen down. Stealing in amongst them, the girl took her seat in the darkest place without uttering a word; but of course she had not been there a moment before the sharp eyes of the women spied her out. One of those, who was cleaning the table, a tall, bold-faced woman, who might, from her appearance, have been to India half-a-dozen times with as many husbands, laid down the plate she held in her hand, placed herself in an attitude of interrogation of a very marked character, and said, 'Are you come to visit any one?'

'No,' said the girl; 'I am going to India.'

'And do you mean to say that you have been ordered to mess with us?'

'Yes,' she answered in a low tone hardly under-

standing the meaning of the question. Thereupon the soldier's wife struck the table vigorously with her fist, and exclaimed, 'I declare it is too bad! Here we are at No. 60, twelve of us already, besides the children, and they send us a new-comer, while down there, at No. 52, there are only ten of them. But I won't be put upon, whatever the rest of you may do; I'll go to the sergeant and complain—I will. Why, we've only just victuals for ourselves as it is. I'll go at once.'

The young woman seized her by the arm with a suppressed shriek. 'O no, no!' she cried; 'pray don't say anything about me. I won't trouble you—indeed I won't. I don't want anything to eat, and, besides, I can buy it, I have money;' and she pulled out a well-filled purse, and held it up before the woman.

'Well, to be sure! you have a sight of money there,' said the other, evidently mollified by the discovery of such unusual riches; 'there's not many of us has such a purse as that, and you have no children that I can see. You are a lucky one, that's certain.'

'Still I don't see why she should not go to No. 52, where they have plenty of room,' said another woman; 'there are quite enough of us here, and I am sure our quarters at night are crammed full already; I don't know where she could find a hole to put her mattress in.'

‘Oh, never mind,’ said the girl, ‘I don’t want to sleep, I’ll lie at the door; I won’t disturb you, only let me stay here. Don’t go to the sergeant.’

‘Let her be, Mrs. Hardy,’ said a quiet little woman from the other end of the table; ‘she is in sore trouble, poor thing, or I’m much mistaken. Don’t let us worry her. She can sleep by me.’

‘Very well, you must please yourself, Mrs. Clement; and if you should be stifled by the heat at night, you have yourself to blame.’

‘And *I* think these are very smart clothes for a soldier’s wife,’ added the other, looking significantly at the girl’s gaudy silk dress. All the heads nodded in acquiescence at this remark, except that of the gentle Mrs. Clement, who quietly moved away a large box, in order to make room for the girl in the dark corner she had chosen, and then sat down silently to her work. Gradually the other women subsided also to their usual employments, which consisted in worrying their children to the last pitch of endurance, and then scolding them for the inevitable result. One little girl, however, who belonged to the redoubtable Mrs. Hardy herself, crept towards the stranger, and began to look up into the dark eyes that were so deeply sorrowful, with an unconscious expression of sympathy stealing over her

sweet childish face. After a moment, she drew nearer, and softly stroked the girl's cheek with her little hand. The young woman's attention being thus attracted, she turned to look at her; and as she met that gaze of innocent, half-wondering pity fixed upon her, a choking sob escaped her. She threw her arms round the child with a sort of passionate tenderness, and lifting her on her knee, she clasped her close in her embrace, and leant her weary head against her. The little girl nestled into her bosom, and remained motionless, till gradually her eyes closed, and she fell asleep on the aching heart that never again assuredly would know the blessed rest of peaceful innocence. After a time, Mrs. Hardy looked round for her child, but, termagant as she was, she had a woman's heart; and as she saw how that countenance darkened by hidden anguish, seemed to grow more gently mournful as it dropped over the calm face of the slumbering little one, she made no attempt to remove the child from her arms, and even ceased to look with malevolent eyes on the gay dress that contrasted so forcibly with the homely attire worn by herself and the other women.

Some hours passed away undisturbed, except by the unceasing din which was created all day long by the assemblage of so many women and children in one

place. At last it so chanced that the acute Mrs. Miller, who was placed at the other end of the room, had occasion to borrow a pair of scissors from Mrs. Clement, and she suddenly made her appearance in the group which surrounded the stranger. For a moment she did not perceive her, and the girl, trembling from head to foot, buried her face among the fair curls of her little companion. But the attempt at concealment was quite in vain. Mrs. Miller bent forward to inspect Mrs. Clement's work, and her eye fell on the crouching figure in the corner. She uttered a loud exclamation, which attracted the attention of all who were near her, and then stood staring at the girl, while she gave vent to her indignant astonishment in a series of fragmentary remarks that were not very intelligible.

‘Well I never! Well! to be sure, here is imperence. Who could have believed it? A brazen-faced hussy!’ and so on, for some minutes.

‘What is it, Mrs. Miller?’ exclaimed all the women eagerly, while Mrs. Hardy especially requested to be informed if she had not shown great wisdom in pronouncing ‘this here young woman to be a bad ’un.’

‘A bad ’un ain’t no word for it, Mrs. Hardy, I can assure you,’ said Mrs. Miller, looking as if she possessed a State secret. ‘Just call Mr. Smith, if *you*

please,' and forthwith she began to call him herself in tones resembling those of an agitated peacock. The cry, taken up by half the women in the room, who crowded round in the delightful anticipation of a scene, soon brought the warlike Smith to the field of action, where he was immediately collared by Mrs. Miller. She dragged him forward, and, with much unconscious stage effect, pointed out the delinquent.

The unhappy girl, forced to leave her seat by the women crowding to the spot, had risen, and now stood like some wild animal at bay, with her merciless pursuers closing round her. With one hand she still held the little child, and pressed her close to her side, while in the clenched fingers of the other she seemed to expend some of the strength with which she would gladly have fought her way out of that crowd of enemies. Her face, meantime, seemed to grow dark with the despair that was settling on her heart, and her eyes, unnaturally dilated, gazed out upon the excited women with a look of savage agony, which was much more the expression of a hunted beast than of a human being. Smith did not look at her face, however, in his virtuous indignation at this breach of military discipline. Setting the women aside, he walked straight up to her, and seized her by the wrist in an iron grasp.



‘ Now, you deceitful young woman, you will please to walk out of this, or I ’ll know the reason why.’

She only answered by wrenching her arm from his hold, with a violence which caused the mark of his fingers to remain in a livid streak upon her wrist ; then, gathering her cloak round her, she crouched close to the wall, as if resolved that no human power should uproot her from the spot.

Smith’s face flushed with anger, and he was advancing somewhat fiercely towards her, when he suddenly met the gaze of her despairing eyes fixed upon him with such a look of hopeless desolation, that it went straight to his honest heart. He paused, rubbed his forehead, glanced uneasily at Mrs. Miller, as if he felt he was about to sink in her estimation for ever, and then, his better feelings mastering him, he laid his hand kindly on the girl’s shoulder, and said, ‘ I ’ll tell you what it is, my poor girl, I am sorry for you, I am, for I can see that you are hard put to it, somehow or other ; but I wish you would believe me when I tell you it is no manner of use going on like this ; you are playing a losing game, you may depend upon it. Why, your papers would have to be seen half-a-dozen times before you could sail. Your luggage must be overhauled, the doctor must see to your health, and the matron to your

outfit. You would be found out over and over again before ever you got on board.'

'And serve her right too! a-setting *herself* up for a soldier's wife,' exclaimed Mrs. Miller. 'I wonder at your meekness, Mr. Smith, I do!'

'You take my advice,' said Smith, nothing moved by this cutting remark; 'just take yourself quietly off, and don't oblige me to report you to the sergeant; for if I do, it's ten chances to one but you go to gaol for coming here on false pretences; and you don't look to me like one of a sort to stand locking-up.'

'Locking-up! O no!' she gave almost a scream; 'anything but that just now. I will go—I will go,' and hurrying nervously from her place, she began to move through the crowd. The little girl still clung to her, upon which Mrs. Hardy seized hold of her and administered a violent shaking, according to the approved mode of punishment adopted by mothers of her description. The child cried out, and at the sound the young woman suddenly turned, stooped down and kissed her, in spite of Mrs. Hardy's resistance, then, thrusting aside all who impeded her progress, she made her way from the room, and finally disappeared.

'There! that's a precious riddance, if ever there was one,' said Mrs. Miller triumphantly.

‘Well, Mrs. Clement, I hope you are satisfied now?’ said Mrs. Hardy. ‘So sure as I am alive, that wench is no better than she should be!’

‘Then she is the more to be pitied,’ said Mrs. Clement, with a gentle sigh. And would to Heaven that all who may read these words would not only agree with her opinion, but act as though they did.

## CHAPTER II.

### COLONEL COURTENAY.

AT noon next day the 'Hero' was to sail with its human freight, and from the first dawn of morning all was bustle and confusion on deck, whilst a constant succession of boats plied between the ship and the shore, bringing the soldiers' wives and children from the Dépôt. Their friends and acquaintances were allowed to see them on board, which added in no small degree to the bewildering noise and confusion; and it certainly seemed as if nothing could reduce the motley crowd to anything like order or quiet.

The principal passenger, however, Colonel Courtenay, took the matter very composedly, and had evidently no intention of risking his comfort by appearing on the scene till everything was ready for immediate departure. At ten o'clock he was still seated at breakfast in one of the most luxurious rooms of the hotel, with apparently no greater anxiety on his mind than the final accomplishment of that repast to his own satisfaction. It would not have been easy to have found a more com-

fortable picture of *bien-être* than he exhibited as he sat in the light of the morning sun, laughing and talking gaily with the beautiful woman whom, within the last fortnight, he had made his wife, and caressing with easy good-nature a rough little terrier frolicking round him.

George Courtenay was a man universally envied, and almost as universally liked; and certainly, in the whole outward aspect of his life and being, appeared to be possessed of all that on this earth is held most good and valuable. He had good birth and a good fortune, unshackled by the duties of a landowner, which to a man of his temperament would have been exceedingly irksome. His father, the younger son of a wealthy peer, had left him an excellent income, which gave him no cause to regret that the family estates had passed to his uncle, Lord Beaufort. In person he was strikingly handsome,—too much so, an artist would have said; for it was a beauty entirely dependent on the regularity of his features, the rich brown of his hair and beard, and the massive proportions of his tall muscular figure. There was no ray from the divine fire of intellect, or spirituality, to glorify the fine face and relieve its earthliness. A painter would have found it easy to make a correct likeness, but he would have had no scope for the exercise of his genius in the play of thought or ex-

pression. In character he was indisputably brave, of which he had given abundant proof in the Indian Mutiny—full of energy and decision,—the sort of energy which carried him at the head of a handful of men amongst a swarm of revolted native soldiers; and the kind of decision which, when the victory was gained, made him only wait to smoke a cigar before he had half-a-dozen of the rebels shot. He was further characterized by two qualities of so very opposite a description, that they might seem to form an impossible combination, though in truth a very common one, and these were deliberate cruelty and careless good-nature; both, in fact, being the development of that which was his ruling passion—an intense self-love. Thus, for instance, in India his black servants found that he never intimated his wishes to them by means of blows, as our freeborn Englishmen are in the habit of doing in that land of their tender adoption, but at the same time they found that he made them work for the gratification of the very smallest of his pleasures till they fainted from exhaustion. He would spend hours feeding and caressing his favourite dogs, but if it suited him to ride a certain distance on a certain horse, he would ride that horse to death without the smallest compunction. Of course, in general society, while his good

nature and lavish generosity were extremely prominent, his cold-blooded selfishness and cruelty were quite in the background, and thus, by the world in general, Colonel Courtenay was considered perfectly charming. It is not to be denied that he was a most agreeable companion, a thorough gentleman in manner, with a full share of the light graceful wit which is so attractive in society; and, as he possessed the additional advantage of a brilliant talent for music, he was welcomed and flattered wherever he went. As to his private life, the refined ladies and gentlemen with whom he associated never gave themselves any concern about it. Not that they were at all deceived on the subject. Every man's secret character somehow makes itself felt in the air that surrounds him, and certain facts had transpired with regard to George Courtenay which laws divine and human have qualified by very ugly names. But the world has a marvellously convenient way of settling such matters. People solemnly accept and believe (chiefly on Sundays) in the eternal truths revealed by the Holy God, and then they go and systematically act as if those truths were lies. How would the brilliant crowd in some ball-room have been startled had a voice proclaimed in their midst, that the noble-looking man whose frank gaiety charmed them, and whose soft tones echoed on

their ears in gentle love-songs, would one day be a condemned soul,—the denizen of hell, the companion of devils! Yet, according to the belief they openly professed, he could be nothing else,—unless he repented, which they knew well he would be exceedingly sorry to do.

It would seem as if in the world it was sufficient that a vice should be fashionable and almost universal to transfigure it into a virtue, or at least into a mild weakness; and crime well-dressed and aristocratic is received with flattering warmth, which, when it appears clad in tatters and vulgarity, is denounced according to the laws of eternal righteousness. Devout old ladies, who were extremely rigid as to the morals of their servants, watched in a flutter of anticipation the attentions of Colonel Courtenay to their unmarried daughters, earnestly hoping that they would ripen into a substantial proposal; whilst worthy gentlemen who spoke loudly at county meetings on pauper dissoluteness, eagerly invited him down to their country houses, and were delighted to see their sons in close fellowship with this fine dashing officer.

Of such were Sir John and Lady Talbot,—‘excellent people,’ as every one said when their names were mentioned; so amiable and benevolent, so ready always to further schemes for the suppression of vice, under what-



ever form they appeared; so solicitous for the moral improvement of their tenantry, and the mental culture of the pauper children; so rigid in dismissing every one from their employment whose conduct failed in being irreproachable, and yet, with the most entire complacency and self-satisfaction, they handed over their young daughter to be the wife of Colonel Courtenay. From her infancy upward they had hired nurses and governesses of the most immaculate description to guard her from the faintest breath of evil; and now, in her riper youth, they called on a bishop to sanction, with much religious fervour, her union with a man whose inner life they well knew no pure eye could dare to look upon. Yet they were not conscious hypocrites; the sense of their inconsistencies never struck them; no voice in the silent night thrilled on their conscience and bade them give account of the soul of the child they had linked to unblushing and unrepented sin. Surely they had done their best for her? They had given her a good position, a luxurious life, and a husband possessed of every attraction earth could offer. Nothing more could be desired in their theology, which consisted in taking with them through life just as much religion as they could carry, without inconvenience, on the easy-going paths of this world. As to the beautiful Julia

herself, she never thought of inquiring into the private character of her husband, simply because she was as much in love with his handsome face as it was possible for her shallow nature to be.

Humanity is full of strange phenomena, at least it seems so to our veiled eyes, and few perhaps appear more inexplicable than the existence of such a character as Mrs. Courtenay's. If this world and all it contains were to last for ever, it would be sufficiently comprehensible ; but she seemed to possess no element of mind or spirit which one could imagine expanding into a solemn immortality. A soul for ever blessed, it is, thank Heaven, easy to believe in ; a state of everlasting wickedness, it is, alas ! not more difficult to conceive ; but a soul *eternally frivolous*, how can such a thing be—what possible position can it hold in the grand infinity of holiness which shall hereafter be made manifest ?

There was one other person in the room with Colonel Courtenay and his wife, who had been sitting silent at a little distance while they finished breakfasting. It was his only sister, Ernestine Courtenay, who had come to witness his embarkation, in order that she might take leave of him at the very last moment. She was exceedingly like her brother in appearance, save in two particulars. She had his face and features, but not so

great a share of beauty ; while she did possess the spirituality of expression which he so entirely lacked. Thus, though no one would have called her remarkably handsome, there was something in the hidden soul within which gave her an indescribable charm, felt by all who approached her.

She had a peculiar look of gentleness, and her voice, even at its gayest, had a pathetic tone which was singularly touching ; yet the prevailing expression of her face was not mere sweetness only ; there were lines of intense thought, making a shadow below the clear eyes, and there was a sensitive tremor about the mouth, which spoke of feelings too deep to be tranquil, while the whole mobile countenance was the instantaneous interpreter of every thought that passed through her mind. It was curious to watch the play of her features when animated : the changes of her ever-varying expression were rapid as the alternations of light and shade on a landscape over which the summer clouds are flying. Even then, as she sat motionless, the thoughts of her heart might be read unmistakably in her eyes. Her gaze was fixed on her brother with a look of intense affection, which showed that to him had been given in largest measure that peculiar trusting love which an orphan girl so naturally lavishes on her eldest brother.

Ernestine had never known father or mother; and George, her natural protector and guide, had been her dearest upon earth, until the day came, a few months before, when the man who was to be her future husband had won from her a yet more absorbing love.

She had always looked up to her brother with thorough admiration and respect; to her innocent faith he was all that the world, better informed, pretended to consider him. She alone, perhaps of all who knew him, was in ignorance of his real character. That man must be base indeed who can let the poison of his own life taint a sister's mind; and one strong motive for the warmth with which he returned her affection was the consciousness of her misplaced trust in him. He knew that she did but love an ideal, yet it was pleasant in her presence to fancy himself for a time the noble high-souled man she imagined him; and there was a sense of rest and security, knowing the world as he did, in the sure possession of this guileless love, which had never failed him.

All her life long, then, Ernestine had met with nothing but kindness from her brother. When he first went to India, now seven years ago, and left her, a sensitive girl of eighteen, to the care of her aunt, Lady Beaufort, she nearly broke her heart, and pined for

many months, till her thoughts were diverted by the severe illness of her only other brother, Reginald, who was younger than herself, and whom she had known but little till she was called to nurse him. When he recovered, however, after two or three years spent in Italy to ward off his rather ominous delicacy of chest, he left her to go to college, and again she began to long for George's return, till, as we have said, a love stronger even than that which she felt for him, came to lure her soul into that species of idolatry, which a woman is so sorely tempted to bestow on the one who can alone take the first place in her heart. Her marriage with Hugh Lingard, however, could not take place for some time. His father had left him an old manor-house, and an estate so heavily burdened with debt, that his present income was entirely swallowed up by the claims he had to meet; so that he could not afford to lose a fellowship he had at one of the colleges in Greyburgh, of which his marriage would deprive him; but he held a small office under Government, with the certainty of obtaining a more lucrative one in the course of two or three years, which would then enable them, with the addition of Ernestine's fortune, to settle comfortably.

Ernestine's great desire had been to spend this interval

with her brother George, with whom she had lived since his return from India, and who had seemed not unwilling to agree to her wish that he should exchange into another regiment and remain in England. All these plans were, however, completely overthrown by the passionate attachment he suddenly conceived for Julia Talbot, and the marriage in which it speedily resulted. There was no longer any reason why he should remain in England, and all thought of keeping her place near him vanished from Ernestine's mind. She had too much good sense to think of living with him even if he had not returned to India, and she felt that he was lost to her as the friend and companion he had been. In her simplicity, however, she believed that his fierce love for the beautiful Julia would last for ever; and if he were happy, her unselfish affection was satisfied, even though finally separated from him. Her only request was that she might be with him to the last, and she had joined him the day before at Sir John Talbot's, whither he had returned with his wife from their brief wedding tour.

Breakfast was over at last, and Colonel Courtenay looked at his watch.

‘It is later than I thought,’ he said; ‘Julia, love, we have only half-an-hour before the time when we must be on board. Are all your preparations made?’

‘No, indeed! I have a great deal to do; yet I must change my dress, and settle what hat I shall wear. Can you not send and tell them to wait for an hour or two?’

He smiled and shook his head. ‘No, I am afraid you must try to get ready; but I daresay, with the help of your maid, you will manage it.’

She answered that she would try, and left the room to spend the last moments of sojourn in her own country, the home of her girlhood, gone for ever, in discussing with her maid the most becoming costume for her appearance on board.

‘One half-hour,’ said Ernestine, as the door closed on her sister-in-law, ‘only one half-hour more.’ She rose and took a low seat at her brother’s side,—‘Oh, dear George, when shall I see you again?’

‘Who can tell, Ernie? It is not my present intention to stay many years in India. I only want to get my promotion, and then I shall retire. I don’t think Julia will like the life out there, though she fancies she will.’

‘Well, so far as I am concerned, a few years is the same as a lifetime; in the uncertainty of the future, I must count on you no more as a part of my happiness, when once you have left me for an indefinite period.’

He did not deny this; but after a moment's silence, he said, 'You have never told me what your plans are, Ernestine. How are you going to dispose of yourself when we are gone? I suppose you will return to Lady Beaufort's till Lingard carries you off.'

'I do not know what else I can do at present; but you cannot think how I dread returning to the hollow objectless life I lived with Aunt Beaufort before you came home. I do so want to try and be of some use in the world.'

'Why, Ernestine, you alarm me! You are not going to turn out a strong-minded female, I hope, and raise a regiment of riflewomen, or establish a printing-press for the publication of pamphlets on the rights of women?'

'I don't think I show symptoms of being very strong-minded just now,' said Ernestine, laughing, 'when I am half breaking my heart at parting from a brother who cares very little about me. And as to the sect who want to raise women out of their natural position, I utterly detest and abjure their opinions; they are contrary to laws both human and divine, in my opinion.'

'I am relieved to hear you say so. I confess to having a great horror of the ladies who are benefactresses of mankind.'

She lifted up her sweet serious face towards him:



‘George, I can quite understand your laughing at this sort of thing ; but, after all, it cannot be meant that women should spend their lives in dressing and visiting, and working at their embroidery. It must be possible for them to be useful to others, without going beyond their own province.’

‘But what then do you mean to do?’

‘I have no defined idea as yet. Till now, you know, George, I have thought of nothing but the happiness of being with you, and I have a bright future to look forward to in hope ; but the two or three years I have to pass first, are too long a time to waste in amusements which weary me beyond expression ; and I am sure of one thing,—there must be in this great suffering world some work even for me, weak and ignorant as I am.’

He respected her earnestness, and did not wish to vex her ; but all such ideas were very repugnant to him.

‘Lady Beaufort will not countenance your philanthropic schemes, Ernie. Do you mean to act without her chaperonage in your future plans?’

‘I do not think there is any reason why I should not. I am five and-twenty, and I have an independent fortune. Hugh Lingard is really the only person who has a right to control my actions now ; and although I

would not do anything to distress Aunt Beaufort, I do not see why I should not quietly go my own way without consulting her.'

'My dear Ernestine, I am afraid it is a dreary prospect. I can conceive nothing much duller, or more oppressive, than a life of general benevolence.'

'But it will be life with a purpose, and that will make up for everything,' exclaimed Ernestine, her eyes lighting up with enthusiasm.

It was a specimen of Colonel Courtenay's selfishness, that he had never inquired into his sister's plans till this moment; and his heart smote him somewhat as he felt that, if he had spoken to her earlier, he might have advised her against those schemes which appeared to him so absurd and unsatisfactory, and which, he believed, would only end in disappointment and annoyance when the realities of the world came to dispel her visionary dreams. To make any serious attempt now, however, to alter her intentions, was more trouble than he could inflict on his indolence.

'I wish I had known what an eccentric career you were planning for yourself, Ernie, as I should have tried to dissuade you from anything of the kind; and I am afraid Lingard will not, he is so strong on letting every one follow the bent of their own inclinations. I ought

to have asked you what your plans were before now ; but the truth is, that little witch Julia has occupied my thoughts entirely for some time past. I am seriously afraid, Ernestine, that you will find these new fancies very impracticable.'

'They are not new fancies, dearest George. The life of mere society has never satisfied me, and I brooded over these thoughts long before you came home ; only I did not think of putting them into execution, because I was looking forward to living with you ; they have revived with double force, however, since I knew of your marriage, and I only want to find some way of giving them shape and reality, for the next two or three years at least.'

'But in the meantime, when you leave us to-day, where are you going ? Do you return to the Beauforts at once ?'

'No ; I have almost made up my mind to go down to Greyburgh to see Reginald. His letters, which are very rare, have made me anxious for some time past. He admits that his bodily health is weak and failing, and he seems to me to be depressed and unsettled in mind.'

Colonel Courtenay shrugged his shoulders. 'As to Reginald, he is a perfect enigma to me. I saw one of

the undergraduates of his college the other day, who was telling me about him. It is incredible that a young man of one-and-twenty should spend his life dreaming over theories which have no more connexion with this world than the man in the moon. I hear he sits up half the night, perplexing his brain with all manner of theological inquiries : *à son âge je m'occupais de bien autre chose !*

‘Reginald was always thoughtful and quiet,’ said Ernestine, ‘but so reserved that I never could thoroughly penetrate into his mind.’

‘Well, I must go and see what Julia is doing, or we shall really be too late. We may not meet for a long time to come, Ernie. I think I shall give you a substitute for myself in the shape of Fury, if you like to have him,’ and he pointed to the wise-looking terrier, who sat with his speaking brown eyes fixed on his master.

‘Oh, I should indeed,’ said Ernestine, her face brightening with pleasure. ‘I have taken care of him in your absence, and he has been such a friend to me—so intelligent and affectionate. I assure you he comforted me in the wisest manner the night after your marriage, when I was feeling rather dreary.’

‘Well, I herewith present him to you,’ said Colonel

Courtenay, lifting the dog by the neck and swinging him into his sister's lap. 'Fury, be faithful to your new mistress. I daresay he would have died in India, so you and he will be mutually benefited.' And stooping down he kissed her affectionately, and left the room.

## CHAPTER III.

### ON BOARD THE 'HERO.'

THEY stood at last on the deck of the 'Hero,' which in ten minutes more was to weigh anchor. The soldiers' wives had been stowed away in the narrow limits they were to occupy for some time to come, and their friends had all been sent on shore. None but the passengers remained, with the exception of Miss Courtenay, who was allowed to wait till the last moment, but the boat which was to take her on shore danced on the waters at the side of the ship, along with several others containing persons anxious to watch the final departure. Colonel Courtenay was standing on the poop talking to the captain, whose quick eye all the while was glancing everywhere to see that his orders were being obeyed. Ernestine leant on her brother's arm, clinging to these last moments when she could still see his face and hear his voice. Mrs. Courtenay, seated at a little distance, was playing the coquette in the most refined and lady-like manner

possible with some of the officers of her husband's regiment. Ernestine remembered the scene long afterwards; everything looked so bright and prosperous, with the sunshine sparkling on the blue waters and on the white sails of the ship.

Suddenly a great noise and confusion was heard at the lower end of the vessel. There was a scuffling of feet, a clamour of voices, and an occasional volley of oaths. A struggle of some kind was evidently going on, and the captain called out angrily to know what was the matter. One of the ship's officers came up to him at once—

‘A woman, sir, who was found secreted in the hold, and refuses to go on shore.’

‘Is she not on the War Office List, then?’

‘No, sir, she is not a soldier's wife at all. Sergeant Dale and Private Smith say they know her for an impostor. She tried yesterday to get herself passed among the women at the *Depôt* with false papers.’

‘Send the jade ashore at once, then, we have no time to lose; we must be off in five minutes.’

‘They are trying to get her into the boat, sir, but she won't go. She is like a wild cat, and clings to every thing she can lay hold of. It took three men to get her up from the hold.’

‘Oh, bother! Hoist her overboard with a rope, then. Threaten her with a ducking for her pains, there are plenty of boats to drop her into. I can’t have the hands hindered from their work.’

The officer touched his cap and went off to obey orders. In another moment a shriek so wild and thrilling that it startled every one on board, rang through the air. A figure was seen to burst from the crowd of sailors, with streaming hair and outstretched arms, dashing them aside with a force which seemed almost superhuman. With one bound she broke away, and leapt from the forecastle, flying rather than running along the deck, up the steps to the poop, and on till she flung herself down at Colonel Courtenay’s feet, and clasped his knees with power which he could not resist. She threw back her head, showing a face, once beautiful, but now distorted by an intensity of agony and passion that smote the bystanders with a sense of terrible mental pain; her long black hair, wet with the dew of anguish that stood on her forehead, fell back in masses from her flushed face; her dark eyes were full of wildness; her whole frame quivered, and her dress, torn and disordered, was stained with blood, from the injuries she had received in her struggle with the men.



It was a pitiable spectacle, but it was left to the tone of her wild mournful voice to convey to the bystanders a conviction of the utter misery that was desolating the soul of the unhappy girl.

Her flight from the one end of the vessel to the other had been so instantaneous, that the breathless impassioned words she now spoke seemed but the prolongation of the shriek that still appeared to echo in their ears. Clinging to Courtenay as if her life depended on the tenacity of her grasp; looking at him, speaking to him only, she gasped out, 'George, George, my own George, save me, save me!—don't let them send me away; I must go with you, I will go with you; I cannot live without you—indeed I cannot: I have tried it, and I cannot; I must be with you—nothing shall tear me from you!'

At this unexpected address, spoken loud enough to be heard by all present, a look of significant meaning passed among the officers of Colonel Courtenay's regiment, and from them to the captain and the men who stood round; while Courtenay himself looked down on the girl at his feet with an expression of absolute fury.

'Is the woman mad or drunk!' he exclaimed, struggling with a cruel violence to disengage himself from

her convulsive grasp ; ‘ how dare you attack me in this way ? Here, men, drag this woman off, some of you.’

At these words a cry more appalling than that which had startled them before burst from the poor girl’s lips. She lifted up her eyes to his face, piteous with their expression of sorrowful dismay,—

‘ O George, my dear George, don’t you know me ? I am Lois, your own poor Lois, that you said you would love for ever and ever. Am I so changed ? I daresay I am, for I have cried my heart out after you pretty near ; but look, it is me myself—here is the ring you gave me, and the locket with your own hair in it, and the bracelet—look !’ And the unhappy girl strove with her trembling hands to show him the trinkets, which she thought might convince him of the identity he knew too well. Courtenay literally stamped with rage and impatience, especially as he saw the smile which was appearing on the face of every man round him, to whom the scene was sufficiently intelligible.

‘ The woman is raving mad ;’ and he made another futile attempt to shake her off. ‘ Leave hold, I tell you, or I’ll have you sent to gaol for a month.’

‘ Me ! me sent to gaol ! O George, it is you that are mad, not to know me ; you can’t have forgotten me ;

you took me from my home; you took my good name; you made father curse me; but I don't care for that—I'd do it all again, I love you so; and you kept me six months—such a happy time; don't you remember? It is but three months since you left me. You sent me to a gay house, and said you'd come to fetch me, and I've waited and waited, and longed for you so; then I heard you were going to India, and I knew I must come. I can't live without you—I can't, and I won't; and oh! George, you will take me with you, won't you? I'll be your servant, or anything you please, only don't drive me away. I love you, I love you so, dear, dear George!' and she burst into tears, laying her face against him, and kissing the fierce hands with which, all the time she spoke, he had been trying to loosen her hold. Not one of the men moved a step to help him; their sympathies were evidently with the girl.

But now Mrs. Courtenay, who had been engaged in a lively conversation at a little distance, began to be attracted by the noise and excitement, and when looking round she saw a woman clinging to her husband, a sudden colour flushed her face, and she came forward, saying, 'Colonel Courtenay, what is the meaning of this?'

‘Only a drunken woman, my love, who mistakes me

for some one else.' Then suddenly stooping down over the girl, he said to her in an energetic whisper,—

'Lois, you fool, I do know you, but that lady is my wife. You can never be with me again; you might have known I had done with you for ever when I sent you away. Go on shore quietly, and I'll give you some money; but if you dare to say another word to me now, I'll have you taken up by the police as sure as I live.'

He knew her! That beautiful lady was his wife! He had done with her for ever. She must not *dare* to speak to him. He would give her in charge. As sentence after sentence revealed to the wretched girl her true position, a stillness as of death seemed to settle down upon her; the passion of her manner died away; the irrepressible burst of feeling ceased with a sudden gasp; the crimson flush on her face faded to an ashy paleness; her hands relaxed their hold on Courtenay; her arms fell by her side; her lips parted, but no breath appeared to stir upon them; and she scarcely seemed to live, but that her eyes, alive with agony, were fixed wide open with a strange fascinated stare on his face.

He saw at once that she was finally subdued, and made a sign to some of the men to take her away. Two sailors came forward, they raised her gently, and

set her on her feet. She made no resistance; it was as though they were dealing with a corpse, but for the staring mournful eyes. Some money which Colonel Courtenay had secretly thrust into her hand fell from her powerless fingers and rolled on the deck. A young naval officer standing near, with an unmistakable expression of disgust at the scene, kicked it away with his foot into the water, and then went to help the men in taking the poor stricken girl as carefully as possible to the boat. They half carried, half supported her along the deck, and she neither spoke nor struggled, only, as they moved her, her head turned mechanically, so that her eyes with their look of anguish left not the face of him who was her best beloved on earth, and her bitterest enemy.

They took her down the gangway and placed her in a boat. Then the officer and sailors came on deck again and stood watching her; the boat shot out from the vessel's side. She was seen seated in the stern, upright, her head turned back to the ship, the haggard gaze still seeking the figure of Courtenay, who stood conspicuous on the poop. Rapidly she was borne to the shore, soon did her form become lost among many others; but so long as it was visible, however indistinctly, those eyes, tortured, despairing, glared back

through the sunlight on the face that had charmed her to destruction. And when he lies an expiring man upon his deathbed, or on the battle-field, shall not these eyes look back upon him still with their remembered agony?

She was gone, and Colonel Courtenay breathed freely again. He was too entirely a man of the world to feel in the least seriously embarrassed at the situation in which he found himself placed; his *savoir faire* would have brought him through worse difficulties than this. The beautiful Julia was no deep thinker, and a whispered regret that her delicate nerves should have been pained by so disagreeable an object as a drunken woman, accompanied by one of his charming smiles, was quite sufficient to restore her self-satisfied equanimity; and in another moment the incident had almost passed from her memory, as she glanced her bright eyes from side to side to see if the grace of her attitude was observed as she leant over the ship's side, and took a sentimental leave of her native country.

As to the captain of the ship and his own officers, Courtenay knew well that they perfectly understood the whole affair; but he also knew that they would offer no open criticism on the private conduct of a man in his official position. So he merely said a few easy words,

which showed that he assumed them to be imperturbably dense on the subject, and then let the matter drop as completely as if it had never occurred. But there was one with whom Courtenay attempted neither palliation nor deceit. Some instinct withheld him from trying any such means with his pure-hearted sister. His hope was that she had neither understood the scene, nor heard the words he spoke to Lois when his wife drew near. He was mistaken. Ernestine had heard every syllable, and she would have understood it all, if she could have brought herself to believe in the wickedness of the brother she so loved and trusted; but such lessons are amongst the hardest we have to learn in this hard life; and she stood there, her cheek now flushed, now deadly pale, with a crowd of bewildering thoughts careering through her mind, and one maddening doubt lying underneath them all, which she felt, if realized, would banish all happiness from her intercourse with her brother for ever. Her brother! beloved, admired all her life long, could it be that he was wicked, cruel, heartless? Her childhood's idol, to whom the incense of such true affection had been offered; had he fallen—fallen into the ashes of the worst corruption? And that poor girl! How her whole soul burned with compassion for the utter misery which her woman's

heart could understand so well; even while the mere thought of its probable cause sent the vivid flush so painfully to her very forehead. Some one had been that hapless woman's curse. It could not be her own dear brother. Yet—what if it were? She shivered from head to foot at the bare thought. So well had she loved him, that the girl's agony seemed to fall like heavy guilt on her own soul; and she felt that if it were so indeed, his victim must become her own most sacred charge. She must know the truth; she could not rest in so hateful a doubt, and the moments were flying fast; already it was time she left the ship. She tried to raise her eyes to her brother; she tried to whisper a few hesitating words, but the nature of the subject checked even the faintest effort. To a stranger she could have spoken better than to him, and already the opportunity was gone. The captain came forward, raised his cap, and, with a regret for hurrying Miss Courtenay, said that 'time was up,' the men were weighing the anchor, and the boat that waited for her could no longer stay alongside. Colonel Courtenay felt that fortune favoured him, for he had read the meaning of her half-averted face, her quivering lip, and crimsoned downcast face; and now he put his arm round his sister, kissed her affectionately, and bade her a tender farewell.



'Take care of yourself, dearest Ernestine, and write soon ; we shall long to hear from you.'

He spoke in his own winning, open manner, and her heart bounded up to him once more. She laid her head fondly on his shoulder, and tried, in a choked voice, to say good-bye ; then he gave place to Julia, who lightly kissed her on both cheeks *à la Française*, and murmured some pretty meaningless speech, and in another moment Ernestine was parted from them both, and seated in the boat to which the captain had conducted her. One vigorous stroke of the oars, and it bounded from the vessel's side. She looked up, and saw through her tear-dimmed eyes her brother and his wife standing at the gangway that they might watch her to the last. As they caught sight of her, Courtenay lifted his hat in a parting salute. She saw the sunlight falling on the rich masses of his dark-brown hair, and his fine face lighted up with the bright smile that had won him many a heart, and, leaning on his strong arm, was the delicate, graceful figure of his wife, stooping down to look at Ernestine, with her fair hair escaping from her hat, and half hiding her lovely radiant countenance. Ernestine looked up eagerly at them as they thus appeared before her in their beauty and happiness, seeking to learn by heart, as it were, and print upon her memory that fair bright picture

that she might carry it away with her, to cherish its remembrance in the long years of absence. But suddenly a shudder passed over her. What if, instead of the charming countenance that shone so bright by her brother's side, there ought to have been, by all Divine laws, by all that is truth, and honour, and equity, that face, pale, haggard, and sorrow-smitten, which she had seen fade from its look of passionate love and entreaty to the fixed, hopeless stare of utter bewilderment, as the low whisper hissed upon her ear, 'Lois, you fool.'

Little, indeed, do we know in what state of feeling an hour may find us. If any one had told Ernestine Courtenay that she would see the figure of her brother lessening in the distance as she was being borne away from him, to meet perhaps no more, and that her thoughts would not be with him, but with another—a stranger in name and history,—she could not have believed it; and yet to that unhappy one, known only by the common power of suffering, her heart was turning now with pain and grief, in which her brother's departure had no share; and her first eager glance when she stepped on shore was not to the ship, already gliding fast away, but to the motley crowd on the pier, in the hope that she might see amongst them the poor girl whom she was resolved at all hazards to find. She looked, however, in vain.

Many faces were there, and many sorrowful enough, but the one living aspect of despair which had so riveted her attention was not amongst them. Ernestine inquired of the bystanders if any had seen her, and she was met with the contradictory accounts which invariably follow a question addressed to a crowd. Several persons had seen her, but all differed as to the direction she had taken on landing from the boat. Ernestine's servant, who had been with her on board, stood with an expression of intense disgust on his face as his mistress thus demeaned herself (in his estimation) by asking questions about a person whose existence he conceived she ought to ignore. At last, seeing that she was actually going to start in search of the girl, his superior wisdom could stand it no longer, and advancing, he ventured to suggest that Miss Courtenay should allow him to engage a policeman to carry on the pursuit, which he felt certain she herself would find utterly impracticable.

Ernestine could not but admit that he was right, much as she disliked using such an agent under the circumstances. The chances of her own search being successful in such a place as Seamouth were certainly small enough, and she trusted that it might be possible to discover the poor girl's abode without letting her find

out that the police had been in any way employed in the search. Ernestine, therefore, herself gave orders, with many minute directions, to the man whom her servant brought to her; and having received his assurance that she should know every particular of the girl's position by the next morning at latest, she left the matter in his hands, and returned slowly to her desolate rooms at the hotel.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE LAST NIGHT.

THAT day was drawing to a close. Within the streets there were all the usual tokens of approaching night: the shopmen were lighting their lamps for the later customers, the labourers were hurrying home, the diners-out were arriving at the houses of their friends,—all things were as they had been the day before, and as they would be when the next day came. Yet strange it is to feel, as the weeks pass over us unmarked and uneventful, that there is no one day of all those that make up our years that is not to some human being the most awful and portentous that can be for them in time and in eternity,—the climax of their sufferings, or the very crisis of their doom. How often is the soft air, as it passes over our cheek, laden with the last sigh of a ruined soul gone to its dread account, or vibrating with the bullet-shot which has made some wretch a murderer. No day—no hour rather—that is not burdened with some fearful struggle, some great crime, some deep

despair. We think we know enough of this world's teeming sorrows, and that we hear too often the many mingled cry that ever rises from the suffering heart of all humanity; but how awful must be the sight on which the Omniscient Eyes look down, to which no tear is hid, no pang unknown of all the weltering mass of this earth's agony! How awful that tremendous sight—fruit of the ancient curse—atoning Calvary alone can tell. For us, we may well give thanks that we know not even all the sorrows that may be gathered in the narrow limits of a single human heart; and that perhaps the one most near our own.

The evening was closing in, and through the busy streets there went a figure,—the same that had hastened the day before so rapidly towards the emigrant *Depôt*. The same, yet not the same: gone was the quick elastic tread, the energy of purpose, the strong, passionate life gleaming in the dark eye and flushing on the fevered cheek, which then had been so marked. Now all was languid, hopeless, apathetic, in the feeble creeping steps, the nerveless arms and drooping head. The tall figure seemed to have collapsed, and was now the form of a woman broken down,—it might be with age, or it might be with sorrow. She seemed to have a definite object, and to be guiding her steps towards some settled goal;

but so feebly, so wearily, that none but a close observer would have thought her course was anything but aimless wandering. This time there was no impetus to carry her through the crowded streets, and she was jostled from side to side without appearing conscious of it. Once a rough carter passing by threw her against the iron railings of an area, and she would have fallen had not his companion caught her on his arm.

‘Why, girl, you don’t seem to know where you are going,’ he said, as he steadied her on her feet. She looked at him for a moment with a dreamy, unconscious gaze; then, as she seemed to understand his meaning, she shook her head, and said in a faint voice, ‘O yes, I do; I know where I am going too well—too well.’ He left her, and she wandered on, and presently she came to a brilliantly lighted shop, where the windows were filled with children’s toys of every description. At one of the huge squares of plate-glass stood two little girls, their arms round each other’s necks, gazing in ecstasy at some of the glittering treasures displayed before them. Just as Lois was passing them, the one said to the other,—

‘O Mary, shouldn’t we be happy if we had those beautiful dolls!’ She stopped and looked at them: ‘Happy, would you be?—then you shall have them.’

She went into the shop, pulled out a gay purse, and bought the coveted toys, with a lavish carelessness as to the price which astonished the shopman. Then she went and thrust them into the hands of the children, who looked at her, and then at their new possessions, in utter amazement.

‘Shall you be happy now?’ she said to them, with a sad sweetness in her tone.

‘O yes, yes!’ exclaimed the children, almost shouting with delight.

‘I am very glad of it,’ she said, ‘for I shall never be happy any more;’ and then she walked away, wiping the tears from her eyes with her hand. Soon she had left the principal streets and entered on the outskirts of the town. Still she held on, taking the direction of the beach, and soon the houses grew fewer, the lights scarce, and the eye could see beyond the town out into the desolate night. When she had nearly passed all the streets she stopped, looked at the purse which she still held in her hand, and then glanced all round as if in search of some one on whom to bestow it. Presently an old man came out of a wretched house and tottered along, guiding himself with a stick, and evidently very feeble. She went up to him and touched him on the shoulder, ‘You are very poor, are you not?’



‘I should think so!’ he exclaimed with an angry exclamation; ‘none poorer, though many makes more cry.’

‘Take this then,’ she said, dropping the purse into his hand. He started, felt its weight, then, struggling feebly to take off his hat, exclaimed, ‘God bless you, my dear lady; you be a good one, you be!’

She left him and went on, then suddenly turned back and came up to him.

‘Say that again,’ she said.

‘Say what, my dear?’ said the old man, who was fastening up the purse with his shaking hands. ‘I’ll say anything you like, for there’s meat, and drink, and baccy for me in this here purse for a month to come. What be I to say?’

‘Say that—that which you said about a blessing.’

‘Was it “God bless you,” I said, my dear? I’ll say it as often as ever you please, and good reason too; for it is little enough I get most days for the asking, let alone such a present as this when I had said never a word. God bless you a thousand times over, and I hope He will.’

She listened eagerly, then cast a wistful glance up to heaven, as though she would fain know if there was any chance of the prayer being heard; but the sight of the

darkening sky seemed to bring no thought of comfort to her, for she drooped her head again and sighed heavily.

‘Anyhow, they are good words to hear for the last,’ she murmured, as she once more took her solitary way along the water’s edge.

And now all human habitations were left far behind, and she had entered on a solitude as complete, at that late hour, as if she were many miles from any town. The scene was cheerless in the extreme: the waning twilight half revealed, half hid the long low beach, with its black masses of dank seaweed and the slimy reptiles creeping to and fro among them; the dark restless waters moaning heavily as they beat upon the unyielding sands; the lowering clouds rolling in heaving masses over the leaden sky. Far away on the horizon there gleamed one ghastly streak of light, where all that remained of the dying day was gathered, while over all the dreary landscape the rising wind went sighing in fitful gusts, rendering the damp air more bleak and chill. Well was this scene in keeping with the forlorn figure that now went stealing with dejected steps along the shore of that dark sea, shivering in the cold blast, and weeping hopeless tears, which brought no relief to the dead weight at her heart. She went on till she

came to a spot where a high rock rose abruptly out of the waves, and shelved back, forming a sort of little promontory, of which the farthest extremity was in deep water.

Up the steep ascent which led to the part overhanging the sea the poor girl toiled with painful steps till she stood on the summit, with nothing around her but the dark expanse of sullen heaving waters. She looked down upon them as they beat with heavy monotonous sound against the rock, and an expression of strange calmness passed over her wan face; then she cast a glance on all sides, and saw that no human being was in sight. She was alone with that leaden sky—that deep black sea—that sighing, mournful wind. Night was falling fast, no one would pass there now till the sun should rise again; that sun which she had watched in its setting as we look upon the face of a dying friend whom we shall see no more. She had time before her yet, and with a long weary sigh she sunk down upon the rock, folded her arms on her knees, and laid her head upon them, whilst in a low calm voice she murmured, ‘Here, then, it must end.’

Her own heart seemed to answer back and ask—‘What must end?’ Even her life!—her life of twenty years—her young strong life, with all its promise for this world, and all its responsibility for that which is to

come. It must end ; there was no question as to that, nor had there been any for the last few hours ; but as she pronounced the sentence, the existence thus condemned seemed to pass in review before her, and drag her back in spite of herself to live it over again in thought from the first day of remembered infancy to this the last—the unendurable !

Her earliest recollection was very sweet and bright. The morning sunlight of a summer day shining on the cottage that had been her home, and was still her father's ; the good old grandmother, who supplied the place of her dead mother, standing at the door, kissing her and stroking her curls as she sent her off to school ; and herself an innocent little child bounding away over the dewy grass, singing and laughing in her careless glee with the merry birds that carolled from bush and bough.

That summer morning, and life all before her—oh, the anguish of the contrast with this dreary night, and death beneath her feet ! She literally groaned as she thought of it, and cried out,—

‘O that I were a little maid once more, playing at my father's door !’ In vain—in vain ! What power could turn the tide of time, and bring the sin-stained woman back to childhood's innocence ? God help those who know the utter agony of the burdened conscience,

longing with that vain longing to recall the guileless days for ever gone !

The next scene that came upon the rack of memory was one of sadness ; yet, contrasted with her present bitter wretchedness, it seemed only to breathe of peace and love. This was the death of her old grandmother. It was from her that Lois had gained all the good that had come to her from external influences. Ever since the day when that good old woman had given the unconscious babe a 'Bible name,' in the hope that she might be as faithful as the Lois of St. Paul, to the night when on her deathbed she solemnly charged her to 'attend her church, and keep from all bad ways,' she had done her utmost to make the child as true a Christian as herself. Nor had the heavenly light she sought to kindle ever quite died out of the fallen girl's life. It was that which now burnt up as with an ardent flame her poor guilt-laden soul.

Lois remembered how they laid her grandmother in the green churchyard on a calm spring day. 'And O that I were lying by her!' burst from her lips, as again the hopeless yearning for the purer past rose madly within her. She remembered the touching Burial Service, and how it stilled her little heart, and dried her childish tears, she knew not how. Alas ! what

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words of blessed hope would ever sound over her unhallowed grave? Then that scene passed away, and she saw her daily life as it went on for years; her father married again; the stepmother was not unkind. Poor Lois had not that excuse, as too many have who share her evil deeds; but she was a weak, timid woman, wholly occupied with the children who were born to her, and quite unequal to coping with a proud, high spirit like that of Lois. She had scarce a place in the girl's remembrance, where two figures stood forth at first with equal prominence—her father, a hard, stern man, whose religion was his respectability, as it is that of nine-tenths of the better class of English peasants, and it was a *cultus* which he found well received by the divinity whom he most delighted to honour—the great lord whose park-gate he kept, and in whose lodge he lived rent-free. He had but one code for his children, which from infancy they learned to understand: so long as they did well, and brought him to honour, they should share the best he had; but in the day they brought disgrace upon him, they might go seek a home and a father where they would, for they should have none under his roof-tree. Far brighter was the other face that looked in upon her from the relentless past—the sunny face and blue eyes of her own sister Annie.

Annie! She started as the name came to her; she had not thought of her since this day had wrought a total change within her; but now, when face to face with death, all things wore their true aspect. The remembrance of her sister was the worst pang that had touched her yet, for she knew that her own ruin had induced that of the child she should have guarded with a mother's care.

She turned sickening from the thought, and welcomed with avidity in its place the glowing recollection which rushed over her of that day, the most beautiful and the most disastrous of her life, whose memory even in that dark hour still thrilled her with a mournful semblance of delight. Well had it been for her if she had died ere ever that day dawned upon her. Yet how little was there in its outward aspect to lead any to suppose that it had been to her indeed a day of doom, pregnant with the accursed seeds of sin, despair, and death. It had been like other days; she rose at early morn, went through her household duties singing like a bird, with light step and lighter heart, and then flew to deck herself for that part of her daily business which specially pleased her girlish vanity. It was her duty to open the gate for the visitors at the Hall, and many a time had she heard them remark upon the beauty which

she well knew she possessed. On that day, as she looked at her face in the glass, she smiled with pleasure, for she saw it was fresh and blooming as the rose, which she had coquettishly placed at her waist; and though she longed in vain for a costly dress like those worn by the ladies at the Hall, she could console herself triumphantly with the reflection that none of them had such masses of glossy black hair as those she had just dressed with elaborate care.

She remembered how she went and sat down with some work in her hand, on which she would have it supposed she was engaged; but really her dark eyes were glancing hither and thither, noticing every one who passed, and seeking an aliment for the excitement her passionate nature craved.

At length she heard on the still summer air the quick ringing gallop of a horse, and soon on the winding road horse and rider appeared. She watched them as they came along; was there ever such a beautiful sight!—that noble gentleman—for so he seemed to her, with his fine face and his haughty bearing, holding in his fiery black mare as it champed the bit, and sent the foam in snow-white flakes on its glossy mane. She knew who he was, though she had never seen him before. He was coming as a visitor of some weeks to



the Hall, and his servant had arrived that day with his luggage. He had been at the lodge, and had spoken of his master. Such a brave colonel, just come from India, where he had killed at least a score of blacks in the mutiny with his own right hand. So in Lois's eyes he was a hero.

She was ready waiting at the gate as he came up. She flung it wide open, and as he rode slowly in she looked up at him with an expression of undisguised admiration on her bright blushing face. Something in her glance attracted him; he looked down at her, and remained struck with some surprise at the brilliancy of her fresh youthful beauty. He made a trifling remark, which brought light into her eyes and a gay smile over all her face. She answered him, glancing up with a look, half coy, half admiring; and when at last he rode slowly on towards the house, he gazed back more than once at the pretty figure leaning against the gate and watching him.

Next day he sauntered up to the lodge, and stood talking in the little garden with Lois,—and the next, and the next; why linger over the sickening details? Soon they walked together daily in a wood at some little distance, where she went to meet him. Colonel Courtenay stayed through the whole shooting season at

the Hall. By the time the day of his departure came, Lois loved him with her whole heart and soul, and desired nothing so much as that he should know it ; her ears were closed for ever to all voices in heaven or on earth alike save his ; and his least word alone governed her will. She saw no more the far-off glory resting on the delectable hills, of which her dead teacher had told her ; only the sight of his dear face was light and life to her ; and all things that pertained to peace, and honour, and a quiet conscience were torn from her soul in the whirlwind of passion.

It was to this that he had willed to bring her, working thereunto with calm, deliberate forethought. So when he left the Hall he rode away on his beautiful black mare which was to take him to the station, some miles distant ; and his host came to the door with him, and took leave of this brave, honourable man with the highest esteem, and Lois's father held the gate open for him, as his daughter somehow was not at home ; and this noble colonel smiled as the man touched his hat, and threw him a guinea, which he thought a very handsome gratuity, and then he galloped away to the station, and walked in amongst passengers and porters with an air of lordly ease. His servant met him, grave and respectful, of whom he asked the question, ' Which car-

riage ?' and he was conducted to one where sat a woman closely veiled. He sprang in, the train darted off, and never more, in all the retributive ages of eternity, can that wretched man undo the fearful ruin he has worked on that poor lost soul.

Three months of intoxicating delight—the recollection of them rushed over her like a delirious dream. A villa at Richmond, servants at her command, beautiful dresses, a fine horse to ride,—these were as nothing compared to the wild joy of being with the object of her idolatry.

But in the course of that brief fever of pleasure she was pierced with one sharp pang, which seemed for a moment to tear the veil from her eyes and show her what she was, and whither tending. A friend of Colonel Courtenay's, who had been staying at the Hall, had seen and admired her sister Annie ; but lacking that indomitable determination to minister to his own gratification at all times which characterized Courtenay, he had regretted that she was a girl of good character, and thought of her no more. Now, the sight of Lois, and his friend's superior villany recalled the wicked thought, and ripened it to crime.

At his suggestion, Courtenay told Lois to write and invite Annie to come and visit her. Annie ! At the

very thought her proud wayward heart sank within her. Anything but that. She saw her again, the little child, so sweet, so innocent, kneeling at her grandmother's knee to say her evening prayer, 'Pray, God, bless my sister Lois.' Oh, whatever she was herself, whatever she might be hereafter, she could not betray that innocent child! For the first time she resisted; she clung to Courtenay, kissed his hands, and told him she could not obey. What! his bought slave dared to dispute his will? One word such as he could speak, one frown such as he could give, and she was at his feet in a moment; she would do whatever he pleased. She wrote and told her sister she was married—married to a gentleman, and she must come and join her; that a like brilliant fate might be hers; and with that she sent her money for her journey, more than Annie had ever seen in her life before. The poor child was unhappy at home since her sister's disappearance. She asked no leave of the stern father, but stole away to join the companion of her happy childhood in the home Lois had described to her; and she knew not 'that the dead were there, and that her guests were in the depths of hell!'

One single day little Annie dwelt in that house of splendid infamy, bringing with her as it were an atmo-

sphere of freshness and innocence which recalled to Lois the dewy fragrance of the early mornings when they gathered wild-flowers in the woods, and the pure serenity of the starlit nights when they slept on their little bed clasped in each other's arms. One day, and the next Annie's father summoned her home, and the gentleman whose admiring eyes had met her at every turn, when he was staying at the Hall a few months before, offered to drive her to the station; but Lois heard the laughing communication to Courtenay of his real plans in taking the girl with him to the railway. Annie went, well pleased with the novel excitement of the rapid motion, and with the opportunity of displaying the hat and feathers which this same gentleman had given her that morning; but thinking no evil beyond the indulgence of her coquettish vanity. As the horses bounded forwards at their master's touch, she turned her laughing face, and kissed her hand to Lois, and from that hour her sister never saw her more, nor did her light step ever again cross the threshold of her father's home.

And, alas! Lois soon ceased to think of her; for the first shadows of the night of sorrow, whose total darkness had now overtaken her, were deepening round her even then. She lived but in one, and that one was beginning to neglect, or rather to forsake her. Days and

weeks he left her now alone, and the look of calm contempt with which he met her reproaches froze into her very soul. Then there came a day after his absence had been longer than it had ever been before, when a letter was brought to her from him, worded almost as tenderly as in the first rapturous days of their acquaintance; he told her he must be absent some time, and he could no longer keep her in the villa she now inhabited. She must go to a 'boarding-house' in London, which he indicated, and remain there till she heard from him. He bade her enjoy herself, and follow in all things the example of the companions she would find leading a merry life there.

This letter was brought by Courtenay's confidential servant, who had orders to remove her; and Lois, so soon as she had read it, began with tears of passionate agony to ask when she should see his master, and implored of the man to let her go to him at once. He answered, with an insolent sneer, that her only chance was to do as the Colonel desired; the gay house was the place for her, and doubtless she would see Colonel Courtenay there, 'or half-a-dozen others as good,' he muttered audibly. Lois felt to the innermost depths of her heart, that the time was come when she must drink the bitter dregs of the intoxicating cup of pleasure,

which the cruel hand of this very honourable gentleman had held to her lips ; but she never guessed the full extent of her calamity. She had ever believed his lightest word, and she believed the mocking promise he made her now. She was to remain there till she heard from him ; therefore she did not hesitate to go to this place at once, clinging desperately to the only hope that remained to her of seeing him, without whom she knew she could not live. She went, and she remained there waiting ; waiting for the fulfilment of his word as men wait a reprieve from execution. Lost as she was, dead to the voice of conscience and the sense of moral right, she yet loathed the place, the life, and herself, who perforce lived in it. One thought alone sustained her : day and night one face was before her eyes, one voice in her ears ; and the cry of her longing agony went out, hour after hour, to him who had taken her from her home and her God, imploring him to come and give her back at least the treasure for which she had paid that tremendous price. In vain ! She might as well have called upon the vanished past to give her back the guilelessness of childhood. But still she trusted him, until one day she heard two men who frequented the house talking of Colonel Courtenay. They knew him, and she listened with a terrible anxiety which seemed to exhaust her

very life. They spoke of his approaching departure for India, and mentioned that he was to sail in the ‘Hero’ two days from that time. Five minutes later, Lois had crossed the threshold of that accursed house, and the night of Courtenay’s departure found her on the lonely rock, the dank night dews falling on her unprotected head, the sullen waters chafing and moaning at her feet.

Yes ; she had retraced her whole life to this hour ; and now unto this hour she had come, and here, she echoed back as she began—here it must end. One stinging thought remained to her, however, from that sad retrospect,—the thought of her sister Annie, lost—lost through her means ! She dashed her head on the ground, and literally groaned when she thought of it. ‘O Annie, Annie ! poor mother’s darling, she must not come to an end like this.’ Suddenly she lifted up her head, raised herself on her knees, and prayed :

‘Our Father which art in heaven, I dare not pray for myself—but for Annie—for Annie, oh let me pray ! She did not know what she was doing, and I did. Oh save her, save her for the dear Lord’s sake. Amen.’

The prayer seemed to calm her anguish. ‘Perhaps God will let me do something for Annie,’ she murmured. ‘What was it grandmother used to say ? “He is full of compassion and of great goodness ;” at least I will try.



I shall die the easier for the chance that it may help her.'

She took from her bosom a little ornamental pocket-book, cherished there because Courtenay had given it to her, and wrote on the page prepared for indelible writing these words:—

‘TO COLONEL COURTENAY.

‘MY DEAR, DEAR GEORGE,—When you get this I shall be dead—dead and cold in the grave, where I’ll never trouble you more; so I’ve nothing to ask you for myself. It is all over with me. You have forsaken and deceived me, and I can’t live; that’s all. I must die. Don’t think I am blaming you, my dearest; for I love you still. Oh, how I love you! But I do want you to do one thing for pity’s sake. I want you to save Annie—my poor little sister Annie. George—George, don’t let her come to a death like mine. I tell you it is terrible. No one but you can save her; for you only know who took her away. I don’t know his name myself. Oh, find her out, I beseech you, and send her home to father. It is the last thing I ask you. I can’t write any longer. George, good-bye; I want to die quick, for I can’t bear this misery; so no more for ever.  
—From your loving

LOIS.’

The fact of writing to him had brought as it were his presence before her, and stirred the depths of her anguish till it was unbearable. With trembling haste she closed the pocket-book, wrapt it in many folds of her handkerchief, and placed it far within her bosom, where she thought the water could not reach it; then she started to her feet, looked wistfully all round, and saw, far off on the eastern horizon, the first faint streak of dawn; at the sight she uttered a shriek: 'Oh! I never will see daylight more,—my own dear George; good-bye!'

She clasped her hands above her head, and bounded from the rock, the dark cold waters opened to receive her; one moment of convulsive struggling in the horror of the death agony, one despairing glance of the wild terrified eyes to heaven, one glance of the dawning day upon the white distorted face, and the dark deed was done, the wondrous human life gave way; the soul violently wrenched from its earthly dwelling-place went forth to its account; and the beautiful form, so fair in its youth, and health, and strength, fashioned for long life and work in the service of its God, went down a dead mass of senseless clay to swell the vast corruption of the grave.

Our ideas of a murderer mostly carry us to the con-

demned cell at Newgate, or, more fitly, to the ghastly scaffold and the sea of human faces round it waiting to behold justice done on the destroyer of life, and blood given for blood ; yet there are other aspects of a murderer in the sight of the Great God, who sees not as man sees, and here is one of them :—A handsome, smiling gentleman, seated in the luxurious saloon of a fine vessel among a merry group of passengers, the gayest of the gay, delighting all present by his charming manners, his exquisite voice, and his sparkling wit ; admired by every woman, envied by every man, a favourite with all. How courteous he is, how gentle, how softly he speaks, how sweetly he smiles ; how lightly he passes over his own great merit when they speak of the Victoria Cross, with which his sovereign had decorated him a few days before, as the reward of his distinguished bravery, and in recognition of the great advantages he had given up for a punctilious point of honour. What affinity could that favoured individual have with the lonely figure, which at that very hour was crouching in mortal agony upon a dark rock overhanging turbid waters, in which she was about to quench her life ?

By the side of this brave officer sits his beautiful wife, to whom he has sworn a hundred times that she is his first, his only love ; and now as night advances he retires to rest, and lays himself down in dreamless sleep,

such as men should know whose hearts are free from care, and whose conscience is unstained by sin; and in dreamless sleep he still was lying when the first streak of dawn flashed on the eastern heaven, and touched with rosy light his slumbering eyes. That same first ray of dawn, which on the lone rock by the sea drew from the white lips of her for whom he had made the sight of God's fair sun accursed, the despairing cry, 'Oh! I never will see daylight more, my own dear George, good-bye!' And as he slumbers on, the moaning waters close over her whom he has murdered, and the life he has blasted is extinguished in that most fearful of all deaths, which leaves to the undying soul no time for a tardy repentance. And for this man, this murderer, shall there be no condemned cell, no scaffold, no avenging justice and consenting crowd? Who is it that has said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay?'

Little shall it avail him that he sleeps securely now. Vengeance, too, may sleep a while, but yet a little, and his condemned cell shall be the grave, his day of doom that resurrection morning, when the Judge of all the earth shall execute justice on him, and the witnessing crowd shall be the mighty multitude of quick and dead assembled before the great white throne, to hear for every soul that ever lived the sentence of the Eternal Truth.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE TRUTH REVEALED.

ERNESTINE COURTENAY returned to the hotel after the departure of the 'Hero' with some dread of the dreary evening before her. In general she was only too fond of solitude, but on this day she would gladly have escaped by any means from the uneasy thoughts that rankled in her mind. Feeling thus, it was with no small pleasure that she welcomed the companionship of the little terrier, Fury, whose speaking eyes beamed with delight from under the overhanging shaggy hair as she approached him. She had tested his powers of consolation before, and there is a very real comfort to be derived from the friendship of a dog. Those who have experienced it will know that this is true; and if they wish to analyse the elements of the satisfaction to be derived from this cause, they will find it in the fact that the affection of a dog is so generous and confiding as regards the person he loves, and so unexact as regards himself. A dog has none of that self-conscious-

ness which our human friend invariably has, more or less, and to which we are obliged to minister, whilst he believes so implicitly in the perfection and goodness of his master or mistress, that we need never fear to be doubted or misunderstood by him.

In the future history of Ernestine and Fury, it will be seen that she at least did well to trust to his almost human comprehension of her feelings, and sympathy with them. He took up his position now at her feet, as she sat by the window while the shadows of evening deepened round her, preferring the aspect of the sky, dull and lowering as it was, to the flaring of the gas-lights within. There was nothing to be gained by letting her mind rest on the subject uppermost in her thoughts, for she could come to no conclusion respecting the unhappy girl whose despairing look still haunted her, till she had seen her next day, as she hoped to do; and therefore she turned herself resolutely to the contemplation of her own plans of usefulness for the uncertain period which must elapse, before her marriage would bring definite duties and occupations to fill her ardent mind.

Ernestine Courtenay had of late been greatly influenced by one of the most striking characteristics of the age in which we live—the spirit of inquiry now

agitating the whole length and breadth of the land as to the real condition of the lower classes, and the responsibility of the upper ranks with regard to them. In a thousand different shapes, in details unnumbered, each one more perplexing than another, has the same great question arisen. The wisest and most learned amongst us have given it their deepest attention. Many who have greater gifts than wisdom or learning have given their lives to it, and even the worldly and indifferent have it thrust before them whether they will or not ; but as yet the result of this living recognition of a mighty universe of suffering and evil lying at our very doors, is the conviction, that of all social problems the most perplexing, the most mysterious, and we may say the most awful, is the condition of the poor, who are never to cease out of the land, and the true nature of their claims upon us ; for this is what hitherto the activity and enterprise of the nineteenth century have discovered on the subject, that in this wealthy, enlightened, and Christian country a portion, fearfully large, of the population are heathens in religion, worn down by the bitter pain of abject want, and brutish from the uncontrolled abandonment of themselves to evil.

We know that round all the luxury, the comfort, and the domestic happiness of our country there is a vast

surging mass of suffering and wrong, where the souls and bodies of God's creatures, untaught, unpitied, and unsuccoured, are drifting day by day from a life unblest to a death without hope. We know this. We know, moreover, that it is our duty to remedy these startling evils; and, for the most part, there is in the upper ranks a willingness, and even an anxiety, to perform this duty, but how, in the name of all that is practical, how is it to be done? Those who have never tried to learn by their own personal experience how the misery and degradation of the poor is to be relieved, can have no idea of the gigantic difficulties that stand in the way of the plain precepts, to feed the hungry, to instruct the ignorant, to loose the bands of sin and let the oppressed go free.

We hear of men and women dying of starvation on the workhouse steps; of the constant recurrence at Waterloo Bridge of suicides such as that of Lois; of children educated in vice; and we know that for things such as these, we, living amongst them in social and intellectual luxury, shall surely be brought to judgment by the Father of the poor. Yet when we would seek to succour or to christianize them, we find ourselves encouraging drunkenness and imposture,—idleness, which prefers a trade of lucrative infamy to a life of honest



labour,—and that deliberate wickedness which has discovered that certain evil qualities have their market value in this world, and therefore are to be cherished and ripened by every means available. In speaking thus, of course, we do but touch, as it were, the outermost edge of that great ocean of darkness and difficulty in which this question is steeped ; but these were some of the reflections which passed through the mind of Ernestine Courtenay as she sat gazing out that night upon the dim gray sky. She thought on this subject with perplexity, it is true, and yet with calmness ; for there was peace for her in the fixed resolution she had taken, that at least in the narrow circle of her individual existence, not only before her marriage, but always, so far as other claims permitted, she would work out this problem with all the energy, power, and devotion of which her life was capable.

Her life—one little, feeble life, how impotent a gift it seemed wherewith to meet the terrible vastness of the evils which lay even within the sphere of her own vision ; yet it was a life which, like that of every other human being on this earth, had its special mission for the furtherance of God's glory, and if even it accomplished but a small amount of actual good, it yet might clear a little space for the labours of more efficient

workers, and sound at least some of the unknown depths of that infinite suffering which was heaving and moaning around her. For Ernestine Courtenay believed in the immortality of the soul, unlike the great majority of those who call themselves by the name of the religion which is founded on that doctrine; unlike them, for if that wonderful belief had really fallen upon their spirits in the greatness of its glory and calm, they could neither have fretted and pined over the passing troubles of their little day on earth, nor looked with such dismay on the manifold evils in the world. To believe in the soul's immortality as Ernestine did, is to know that for the whole mass of this earth's misery there is an infinite compensation, a perfect solution, in that grand eternal Love into which all of the human race who seek it, shall be drawn up to find, in perfect union with the will of God, for the past as well as the present, a thankful acceptance of that which in the darkness of earth's night seemed to be evil, but in the pure light of the unending day shines forth as heavenly good.

This was her faith, and therefore it was that, with a quiet resolution of enduring constancy, she prepared to give herself, so far as she might, to advance, were it but a hair's-breadth, that glorious consummation. As yet

she did not see one step before her as to the means by which she was to carry out this resolution ; not because there was any lack of opportunities, but because the field was so vast, the evils so manifold, the channels of usefulness for her and for all so numerous and so urgent, that she believed to each one on earth must be given some special work to do on behalf of their fellow-creatures, if only they have the heart to undertake it ; and believing this, she did not doubt that her own portion of the universal labour would be made known to her when a fit time came. She knew who had said, ‘He that followeth ME shall not walk in darkness ;’ and she felt that amid all the dimness and perplexity of the world in which He went about doing good, the trace of His steps shines forth ever as a luminous path, whereon the feet of all may safely tread, who follow Him in sincerity and truth.

And while Ernestine sat there thinking thus, the darkness deepened round her, even as the night which never was to lighten into day was deepening in the soul of her who was keeping her death vigil on the lonely rock by the cold sea shore ; and Ernestine little dreamt that, in the silent tragedy which was being enacted there beneath the eye of God alone, she was to find the token her faith so wisely sought to show her

the work appointed to her on earth for the glory of God and the good of His suffering creatures.

Ernestine's first thought next morning was for the poor girl of whom she hoped to hear some tidings, and when her early breakfast was over, she sat waiting anxiously for the arrival of the policeman, who had promised to come as soon as possible to tell her the result of his search. Hour after hour passed away, however, without his appearance, and Ernestine began to grow very impatient. She did not wish to remain in Seamouth longer than she could help, and the idea that he might after all fail in obtaining any trace of the unhappy girl, gave her more pain than she could well account for. She waited some time without making any inquiry, for the dread that her brother might indeed be only too deeply implicated in the matter, made her shrink from mentioning the subject; but at last, as the day wore on, she could no longer delay, and having sent for her servant, she told him to go and find the policeman she had seen the day before, as she wished to speak to him. The man looked perplexed, and at last said, with some hesitation, that the policeman had been there already.

‘And why was I not told?’ exclaimed Ernestine, much

vexed. The servant shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

‘The policeman found Fenton still here,’ he said, ‘and he took him out with him.’

Fenton was Colonel Courtenay’s confidential servant, whom he had left behind.

‘What had he to do with Fenton?’ said Ernestine, colouring; ‘you knew that I had told him to come and speak to myself this morning.’

‘He found that Fenton could give him some information he required.’

Ernestine turned away to hide her burning cheeks. ‘The man has made a great mistake,’ she said; ‘I wished him simply to ascertain where that young woman had gone. You will go, if you please, and call Fenton back, there is no occasion for his interference; and tell the policeman to come to me.’

‘He said he would return in the evening, ma’am; but I think I ought to let you know there has been an accident.’

‘An accident! What do you mean?’

‘That young girl, ma’am, it is no use looking after her any more,—she was found this morning drowned!’

Ernestine started to her feet and stood transfixed; the pallid face of the girl as she had last seen her, with her despairing look fixed on George Courtenay, rose up

before her, and a horror beyond words took possession of her as to the manner of her death ; but the man had said an accident. Oh ! that it might, indeed, be only an accident which had quenched that forlorn life ! She clasped her hands tightly together that her agitation might not appear, and said, ‘ How did it happen ? ’ Is it known how she was drowned—quick—tell me ? ’

‘ There is no doubt, ma’am, that she made away with herself. Two men in a fishing-boat saw her throw herself into the water, and they went to her as quick as they could, but before they could get her out she was quite dead.’

Ernestine buried her face in her hands with almost a groan of anguish. The man went on hurriedly, as if there were something which must be said, and the sooner the better.

‘ The policeman came here, ma’am, to ask you to attend the coroner’s inquest on the body ; but Fenton told him he could give more information than you could, and he said the coroner would be glad not to have to ask a lady to attend ; but the policeman told me to beg you to be so good as not to leave Seamount till he had seen you, for there was some kind of a paper addressed to Colonel Courtenay found on the body, and they wished to deliver it to you, as the Colonel has sailed. The

policeman said he would come when he was off duty to-night.'

'That will do,' said Ernestine in a low voice; 'I will see the man when he comes;' and the servant left the room. Then, when she saw that she was alone, she flung herself upon her knees, and sent as it were her whole soul to heaven in the one imploring cry: 'My God, forgive, forgive him;' but the very words which thus came spontaneously to her lips brought with them a revulsion of feeling. 'Why should I judge him?' she exclaimed, starting to her feet; 'my poor brother, he may be wholly guiltless of this dreadful death; he may have erred through thoughtlessness, or even through compassion for the lost. I have heard of such things; at least I will wait till I know the whole truth.' And unable to endure the restlessness of suspense, and the dull aching at her heart which showed that she strove in vain to deceive herself, she walked to and fro through the miserable hours of that long afternoon, seeking vainly to lose, were it but for a moment, the consciousness of the terrible certainty from which there was no escape, that the unhappy girl she had seen the day before living, breathing, suffering, now lay cold and rigid in the irrevocable silence of that death which to her had been no heaven-sent rest, but a self-wrought crime;

and why—why had she died? This was the fearful question that racked poor Ernestine through that dark troubled day.

At a late hour she was disturbed by the entrance of a waiter with the evening paper, which he laid on the table before her. ‘Latest edition, ma’am, just out; thought you might like to see it;’ and having lighted the gas he left the room.

Ernestine continued to walk to and fro restlessly, taking no notice of the newspaper, till, as she passed the table, her eye accidentally caught the heading of a column in the ‘Latest Intelligence,’ ‘Inquest on the body of a young woman found drowned this morning.’

She had not thought of this, and a sickening dread as to what she might learn came over her as she seized the paper in her trembling hands and sat down to read it.

The account of the inquest and the depositions of the witnesses were given at length; for such events were much less common in Seamouth than they would have been in London.

First there was the testimony of the two men who had witnessed the suicide. They described how they had been out all night with their nets, and were



coming slowly homewards as the dawn approached, when suddenly they saw the figure of a woman standing on a rock ; one moment only they saw her stand, and then with a cry, whose mournful echo reached them even where they were, they saw her fling herself with one bound into the sea. She sank, then rose for a moment, and sank again. They rowed with all possible speed to the place, which they had carefully noted, and found the water sufficiently shallow to give them a chance of reaching the body with their boat-hook. Nearly half-an-hour elapsed, however, before they succeeded in finding it, and when they were at last enabled to bring her on shore, they were convinced that she must be quite dead. Nevertheless they carried her to the nearest house, a fisherman's cottage, and one of the men went at once for the doctor.

The doctor's evidence was then given very briefly, to the effect that he had endeavoured for upwards of an hour to restore animation, without success, and that he had no doubt the young woman had been dead some time before he saw her. On examining the body, he had found a pocket-book within her dress, which had been placed in the hands of the coroner.

The coroner here stated that the pocket-book contained only a letter addressed to Colonel Courtenay, of

the —th Regiment, which he would lay before the jury when the witnesses had been examined.

Policeman X next stated that he had been requested the day before by Miss Courtenay to find out the abode of a girl she had seen on board the ‘Hero ;’ that he had traced the individual in question to a lodging-house which he had reached in the evening, and found from the woman who kept it that she had just gone out. He had followed in the direction she had taken, and he found that the last person who had seen her was an old man, to whom she had given money ; and he then lost all trace of her, till hearing in the morning of the suicide, he suspected it might be the same person, and took the lodging-house keeper to see her, who at once identified the body.

This woman now appeared, and said that the girl had been for two days at her house. She had seemed very energetic and animated when she first came, and stated that she was going to India in the ‘Hero.’ At first she had said she was going with the soldiers’ wives, but on returning from the emigrant depôt announced that she had changed her plans. The next day she had been out all morning, the woman did not know where, but after the ‘Hero’ had sailed she came back so altered that she seemed no longer like the same person. She had

sat down in a corner with her face buried in her hands till evening, then she rose, paid what she owed without speaking a word, and went out. The woman never saw her again till the policeman took her to look at her dead body.

An old man then described his meeting with her near the beach ; her giving him a purse containing money, and her coming back to ask him to pray God to bless her.

Fenton, Colonel Courtenay's servant, was then called to state what he knew of the deceased. His evidence was given in such a manner as to display the peculiar characteristics of that phase of human nature which develops itself in the fashionable servant of a fashionable man. It was very evident that Mr. Fenton found the public revelation he was called upon to make, a favourable opportunity for paying off his late master for the various occasions in which his selfishness had interfered with his servant's pleasures or vices—the terms being in this case synonymous.

He deposed that he knew the deceased very well. Her name was Lois Brook. She was the daughter of the gate-keeper at Carleton Hall. Colonel Courtenay had seen her there. She was a fine-looking girl then, and he had taken her away with him, as gentlemen will. He kept her three months at Richmond, longer than Fenton had

ever known the Colonel keep a girl. By that time he was courting Miss Julia Talbot, his present wife, so he sent Lois Brook to a gay house, and never troubled his head about her again ; but the girl was wild about the Colonel, and was fool enough to fancy he would come to see her. Fenton had no doubt, from what he had heard, that she was determined, by hook or by crook, to go to India with him. He had been on board the 'Hero' the day before when she was found in the hold. He heard her begging the Colonel to take her to India with him. The Colonel swore at her, he believed. Anyhow, he settled her somehow ; and Fenton would really have been sorry for the girl, if he had not been so used to that sort of thing in Colonel Courtenay's service. He saw the girl taken ashore, and he was not surprised to find that she had made away with herself. The Colonel could make himself very pleasant to those who only saw him occasionally, and Fenton knew he had promised the girl half a hundred times he would never forsake her ; and he had often heard her tell him she would die if he did, so she kept her word to him sure enough ; but, bless you ! the Colonel would not have cared if she had made a hole in the water before his very eyes.

Here Fenton's evidence terminated, and the letter

poor Lois wrote in her death agony was handed round by the jury. It was given entire in the paper, and Earnestine read it word for word. Finally the jury consulted, and gave in their verdict, the usual conventionalism,—‘That the deceased destroyed herself in a fit of temporary insanity;’ a sentence which they recorded with as much pomposity as if it had been a striking novelty. Just as they were about to separate, however, a juror started up, a butcher, as it happened, by trade, but an honest, true-hearted man by right of nature, and demanded that a resolution should be passed, expressive of the jury’s extreme disapproval of Colonel Courtenay’s conduct to the unfortunate girl. The coroner, a man of higher ‘cultivation’ than the sensitive butcher, was quite shocked at such an unheard-of proposal. Most unbecoming, most improper. They were not there to try Colonel Courtenay, a gentleman of position and high family; a very distinguished officer, the coroner believed, decorated by her Majesty. Of course gentlemen would indulge their little fancies, but it was highly creditable to Colonel Courtenay that he had dismissed this young woman before his marriage. The coroner had no doubt the gallant gentleman would have amply provided for her, if she had not placed herself out of his reach in this very culpable manner. The coroner

trusted he should never again have to comment upon such an improper proposal from a juror.

With this the inquest terminated. Ernestine Courtenay let the paper fall from her grasp, and sat with her hands clasped on her knees, and her eyes wide open, gazing into vacancy, while a sensation of horror and dismay chilled her to the heart. Gradually, as she sat there, an expression of grave determination, such as never before had settled over that fair sweet face, grew dark and rigid upon it. There are moments in this life which come to us with such tremendous power, that they can actually petrify, as it were, the subtle human spirit into one peculiar mould, in which it remains fixed and unchanged for life. Such a moment there was for Ernestine when she learnt the truth of her brother's guilt and his victim's death, and her soul was sealed in that hour with an impress which it would carry with it into eternity.

She had, however, little time for reflection ; the policeman was ushered in, and she turned round calm, though deadly pale, to meet him. He brought the pocket-book containing the letter to Colonel Courtenay, and said he was desired by the coroner to place it in her hands. She shivered as she took it, discoloured by the water which had blotted out a human life. The

policeman was about to enlarge on the inquest, but she stopped him hastily.

‘I have seen the newspaper ; I know it all ; but I wish to ask you one question, Where is the body ?’

‘It is still at the fisherman’s cottage, ma’am ; but it will be removed to the workhouse to-night, and buried to-morrow by the parish authorities. If they had brought in *felo de se*, you know, ma’am, it could not have been—’

‘I know, I know,’ exclaimed Ernestine, hastily interrupting him ; ‘but can you tell me if there would be any objection to my undertaking the funeral expenses ?’

‘Well, ma’am, I should say not, by no means ; they would be glad enough to save their pockets, I make no doubt.’

‘But in that case could the body be allowed to remain where it is till proper arrangements could be made ?’ I should not like it to be moved.’

‘That depends on the fisherman and his wife ; if they don’t object, no one else would ; and if you were to make it worth their while, I should think you might do as you pleased. They seemed poor folk enough.’

‘It must be settled now though. I suppose orders were given to remove the body to-night ?’

‘Yes, the workhouse cart was to be sent for it ; but I

can stop that, if you wish me to tell the master of the workhouse that you will bear all expenses.'

'I should be obliged to you to do so.'

'And some one must go to the fisherman,' continued the policeman. 'I should not have time myself.'

'I will settle that, if you will tell me precisely where the cottage is.'

'It is easily found; it is the first cottage you come to on the beach after you leave the town. Hill is the fisherman's name; any one could show it.'

'That will be sufficient.' She dismissed him; and then went to the window and looked out. The twilight was deepening, but it was not yet quite dark, and in another moment Ernestine, with her face veiled, and her cloak wrapped round her, was taking her way in the direction the policeman had indicated.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PROMISE TO THE DEAD.

AND again the long low beach lay dim in the twilight, and the rising wind swept in fitful gusts across it, and all things were as they had been the night before when Lois Brook still held the awful gift of life within her power,—the seed of immortality which she had madly flung upon the barren waste of waters, when even then it might have ripened under the gracious dews of heaven-sent penitence to bear rich fruit in the eternal harvest, and be for ever stored in the garner-house of God.

And now, as then, a woman walked with sorrow-laden steps along the sands; for the horror Ernestine felt for her brother's sin produced an anguish as near akin to remorse as one actually innocent could feel.

A low-roofed cottage, with nets spread out to dry, appeared in the shadows before her, a light twinkling in one window, the other looking black in the white wall. Ernestine knocked softly at the door; a rough-

looking woman opened it, and seeing a lady, drew back and asked her to walk in. She entered a little kitchen, scantily furnished, with a few cinders burning on the hearth, over which a man was crouching, spreading out his hands to catch the faint heat. A little girl sat on the ground near him, and two younger children were asleep on a wretched bed spread on the floor. On the table some empty cups and plates revealed that a meal of some sort had taken place, of which not a vestige remained.

The woman wiped a chair with her apron, and asked Ernestine to sit down, with much more civility than might have been expected from her appearance. But amongst our English poor, the one idea which presents itself to their mind when they are brought in contact with a person above them in station, is that of gain, for which purpose they are ready with all possible servility; and this is the case even with those who are not in needy circumstances. It is a disagreeable fact, but a true one; and in this book the truth must be told about the poor, instead of their being represented in ideal colours, as they generally are in novels and religious works of fiction. The fisherman merely looked round and touched an imaginary cap upon his head without speaking. Ernestine sat down, begging the woman to

do the same, and then remained for a moment silent, during which time the man and his wife speculated as to the purpose of the lady's visit, and the woman resolved that whatever it might be, she and her children should be the better of it. At last Ernestine spoke—

‘It was to your house, was it not, that the body of the poor young girl was brought?’

The woman took her cue at once.

‘That it was, and pretty sight of trouble it has cost us all, and not a penny have we had give us to help us through with it. Why, it has put the place all of a muddle. I never was so upset in my life.’

Ernestine looked at her in amazement. Heart-sick as she was herself with the unavailing pity that oppressed her, it seemed to her marvellous that any one should connect the presence of that forlorn corpse with thoughts of self and of petty discomfort.

‘Well, ma’am,’ said the woman, answering her look, ‘just look at them children turned out of their beds and left to sleep on a bit of a quilt, all along of that corpse. I could not get them to sleep in the room with it not nohow. Me and my husband we made shift to stop beside it, for we have not another hole to put ourselves in but they two rooms.’

‘I am very sorry you have been inconvenienced,’ said

Ernestine, fearing it would be quite in vain to ask them to keep their silent guest.

‘Ah, little them crowners and juries cared for our convenience. They crowded into this room, if you’ll believe me, ma’am, till there was not a corner left for me to stand in. They just gives a look at the corpse, then off they goes to the public-house to sit upon it comfortable, and never so much as offers us a farthing for our trouble; not but what I told them as me and my husband we works hard for our living, and I’ve lost a day’s work by it, and mayhap two.’

‘Then I am afraid,’ said Ernestine, ‘you could not be induced to let the body remain here another night. I would willingly pay you well,’ she added hastily, seeking to anticipate a refusal, which the woman had not the least intention of giving.

‘Well, ma’am, I don’t know but what I would be willing to do a kind action by the poor thing. It will be a world of trouble, to be sure, but I has a feeling heart, ma’am, and it’d hurt me to see her took off by the work’us cart. One of the children’s ailing, sure enough, and it is a sin and a shame to keep him out of his own bed, still I’d wish to do as I’d be done by. I’ll keep her, if you asks me, only it’ll need a good bit of money to make up for all as it costises us one way or another.’

‘Will this be sufficient?’ said Ernestine, putting into her hand a sum of money, so far beyond what the woman expected, that she at once began to exclaim that she would keep the body in her house three or four nights if the lady wished it; but Ernestine, little as she knew of the poor, could not be blind to the woman’s selfishness, and answered quietly that one night was all she asked, the body would be buried next day.

‘Did you know this poor wench, ma’am?’ said the fisherman, for the first time looking round—the financial department being evidently entirely in the hands of his strong-minded wife.

‘I only saw her once,’ said Ernestine, her voice trembling, ‘but I know her history, and I wish to do what I can for her still.’

‘Ah, friend and foe is all alike to her now!’ said the man, shaking his head. ‘Poor wench! poor wench!’

‘My husband ’tended the ’quest to-day, and he’s quite upset by it; he’s been a-moaning and groaning over the girl ever since; but I tells him he has no call to trouble hisself for such a one as she were.’

‘And I say,’ said the man, suddenly striking the table with his clenched fist, ‘that that ’ere fine gentleman as took her out of her father’s house and ruined her, and then broke her heart, and let her go and drowned her—

self, is as big a scoundrel as walks the earth, and I'd tell him so to his face if I seed him here now.'

Ernestine sat motionless for a moment, and then said, in her low sweet voice,—

'You are quite right, he is most guilty; but are there any on earth so much to be pitied as the wicked? Should we not pray for him, that he may repent of his deadly sin?'

'Pray for him! If ever any rascal were to serve my Katie here as he has served that poor dead corpse, I'd have the life out of him once for all, though I had to swing for it the same day;' and he drew his little daughter to his side with an impassioned violence.

Ernestine hid her face in her hands without speaking.

'Law! John, you frightens the lady with your tantrums; ha' done, I tell you. Would you like to see the corpse, ma'am?' she added, as if offering a soothing palliative.

'Yes,' said Ernestine, rising; 'I do wish to see it, but if you have no objection, I should prefer to go in alone.'

'Just as you please, ma'am; I've no objections, if you are not scared; and she's a very pleasant corpse, I must say that.' She gave Ernestine the rushlight which burned on the table, opened the door of the room, then closed it after her, and George Courtenay's sister stood alone in the presence of his victim.

In one corner of the room stood a bed, in the other, a board placed on two chairs, on which lay the body of Lois Brook. A sheet was spread over it, on which the dim light cast shadows that made it seem to move as Ernestine came near. She could have fancied that the dead corpse writhed beneath its covering when she approached; and in spite of herself, she shook from head to foot as she placed the candle on the table and uncovered the face. Then, as she gazed on it, she ceased to tremble; for when she had last looked upon that countenance it had been terrible from the bitter anguish with which it had been convulsed; and now, wheresoever the soul of Lois Brook might be, at least the stamp of agony had passed from her dead face—cold, white, and rigid it was, but fixed into such stillness as no living heart could ever dream of. Not only were the despairing eyes which had so haunted Ernestine now closed as in gentle sleep, and the mute lips sealed for ever from whence that dreadful shriek had rung, but there had passed over the countenance that peculiar change which is often seen, even in cases where death has taken place at an advanced age, when the features seem to return to the mould in which they were first cast, and grow childlike again, as if the cold hand of death had wiped out all trace of the life they have

passed through, and smoothed away the furrows left by this world's care and suffering.

In the present instance, it seemed as if it were actually the face of a child that shone out so white from the dark masses of hair that hung around it; and as Ernestine bent sorrowfully over it, these touching words came vividly to her mind:—

‘Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan them, for they are at rest; but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.’

She knew that, according to the spiritual interpretation of an old writer, he that went away, went from holiness and innocence to serve the world, the flesh, and the devil, never more to return to God, or see in heaven the native land of His elect. Well might the case apply to Lois and George Courtenay. The girl had fearfully erred, but she had been the tempted, not the tempter; and as for the deed that destroyed her life, she might well be supposed to ignore, with the majority of the poor, that it was a crime. For her, at least, it might be that there remained a refuge in the Infinite compassion, which still, through the long vista of centuries, echoes in our ears those tenderest words: ‘Neither do I condemn thee.’ But for him, the educated gentleman,



the clever, clear-sighted man of the day, what excuse could be found in heaven or in earth? The tempter, the betrayer, with deliberate forethought, and now the murderer,—who shall remove the blood-guilt from his head? For a passing self-indulgence he had trampled under foot the innocence, the happiness, the life of one of God's creatures, and steeped in deadly sin a soul that could never cease to live through all eternity; and where could the annals of crime record a blacker deed than this?

Ernestine was aware that in giving this judgment out of the determined truth of her nature, she was reversing the sentence of the world in such matters; but not the less she felt in the depths of her true spiritual instinct that it was thus the comparative guilt in such cases was balanced before the righteous God of all. And she was right. In vain will be all efforts to stem the 'social evil' in this land, so long as this, the most odious of the world's hypocrisies, is allowed to hold the place of justice and equity with regard to it. It is a marvel which can only be accounted for by the power of self-deception, inherent in human nature, that any who profess the principles of truth and honour, much less of religion, should dare truckle to so mean a sham as that which pretends to uphold the interests of

morality by trampling under foot the fallen woman, and holding out the right hand of fellowship to the man who dragged her into sin, and shared it with her.

No amount of contumely, of degradation, and of abhorrence, can be too much for the weak, ignorant girl who has listened to the voice of the tempter and believed his lies; but as for the experienced man, with every advantage of position and education, who knowingly, wilfully, has chosen vice for his pleasure, and the ruin of an imperishable soul for his amusement, by all means let him be received by the most immaculate society, and honoured with all such homage as his worldly advantages command. He might be appointed inspector of the public morals, if such a post happened to exist in England; for on him there is no disgrace, no stain. That which, in the feeble and thoughtless, is a crime, to be punished with a severity from which there is no escape but in death, is in the strong and experienced but a natural weakness, bearing round it, in the eyes of younger men, a certain *prestige* of manliness which attracts their imitation. Nor is the world ashamed of its code of morality. No one ever questions the social law which protects the sin in the one case, and hunts it down in the other. The public journals lately gave a notable instance of effrontery in this respect.

At a recent trial, which involved a question as to a young man's moral conduct, his counsel openly announced his belief that there was not a statesman, or a bishop, or a judge on the bench, who had not committed similar 'follies' in his youth; and if there were one, he added, he should think the worse of him for it!

Who cares what dead men's bones fill the whited sepulchre, if only it be garnished with the appliances of wealth and station! Let the pale wasted girl be driven from your door; suffer her not to contaminate with her presence so much as the pavement under your foot; but take my Lord, her betrayer, by the hand, and seat him at your table, heap honours and friendship upon him, and give an indulgent smile to the rumour of his deeds of darkness.

So judges the world in its well-varnished complacency; so does not the Most High God judge in the clear light of His perfect justice.

But Ernestine Courtenay had not come there simply to look on her brother's victim from curiosity. She had come to renew, in presence of that mute witness, the resolution she had taken as she sat for the first few moments motionless, with the record of her brother's guilt lying at her feet. The knowledge of his crime had entered into her soul with an anguish only less

bitter to her than the unavailing pity with which she thought of the lost girl, dead by her own hand. Yet for neither of them could she do aught now; both were beyond her reach: the one in his independence, his luxury, his determined freedom of will, to make his whole life black with sin, if he chose it; the other in the stern coldness of that inanimation over which the words ‘Too late, too late,’ could alone be spoken.

Still there was one way in which it seemed to her she might even yet serve both. She might try to save that other lost one, the guilt of whose ruin lay on both their heads alike. The dying appeal of Lois Brook on behalf of her sister Annie must not fall to the ground unheeded; and Ernestine had learnt in that day’s revelation to know her brother too well to hope that he would ever respond to the last prayer of his unhappy victim. The man who could deal with such selfish cruelty by the soul which he himself had ruined, was little likely to give a single moment from his luxurious ease to seek the deliverance of one who was only the victim of his friend.

But Ernestine could feel that in this she was surely appointed to be the representative of her brother. To her had been brought that letter, with its half-obliterated words; and to her heart, heavy with the weight of that dreadful suicide, had come the piteous cry of the

dying girl, when, in the last agony of life, she had called upon her Father in heaven, and upon her best beloved on earth, to save her sister Annie. God—how far more merciful than man—had heard the prayer, and sent to the rescue a brave true-hearted messenger, who had resolved that she would never cease her efforts to seek and save that one lost child.

And now, as Ernestine stood and looked upon the marble face which she had seen but once living, and once dead, and which she never more would see till, at the voice of the archangel, she should rise and behold life quivering through those fixed lineaments, and Lois standing by George Courtenay's side, to hear their sentence from the lips of the One All Pure;—as she looked on the cold corpse and thought upon these things, her heart burned within her, and she felt that life itself were cheaply given, and with life all she might have to sacrifice, in the search on which she was about to enter, if only in that tremendous hour she might bring this one soul, rescued from the enemy and the avenger, to the dear feet of Him whose infinite compassion flowed forth in His very heart's blood for the wandering and the lost.

Yes, all that she must sacrifice. Ernestine did not deceive herself; she knew that for a young lady of her

rank in life to go out alone into the very haunts of sin to seek one of the fallen and degraded of her own sex, would be considered a very reprehensible departure from the usages of the society in which she had always lived. She must break down the barriers that hedged her in from so much as a knowledge of the existence of the deadly vice, with which she had now to grapple face to face. She must overcome the shrinking horror which she felt for even the slightest contact with this hateful evil. She must lay aside the natural reserve which on such a subject sealed not only her lips, but her inmost thoughts. To do all this would be a sore trial for a pure-minded Englishwoman; and yet, for that very self-sacrifice, she knew she would meet with unmitigated censure from all her acquaintances. She would be told that her conduct was improper, unbecoming in a lady, and incompatible with womanly delicacy. She would hear that it was contamination to breathe the same air with the degraded and the lost; that the scenes she would witness, the words she would hear, would seem to herself so corrupting, that she would feel unable to pass from that atmosphere of vice to the polished society where sin is ignored, and men and women, by common consent, agree to hold each other immaculate. To all this Ernestine had an answer

ready in her heart from the memory of these words, 'They shall walk with Him in white.' If with Him who passed unscathed and spotless through this world she walked amid the scenes of infamy where undefiled charity might lead her, she knew that she might keep the garments of her soul as white and stainless as the mountain snow; and the presence of the deadliest evils that ever cursed the earth, would be to her as harmless as the hot breath of that fiery furnace in which the three children walked unhurt, because of One who was with them in the fire.

'If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.' This promise, made to those who first carried the Gospel of Peace to the people who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, would not fail her who was about to carry the Evangel of Mercy to the fallen, and she would be as safe from harm by touch of evil as they were from the poisoned cup or venomous snake.

'Oh, who could live to seek their own happiness alone!' said Ernestine, as she laid her hand on the cold forehead of the dead girl, 'while sights like these are common on the earth, and each day adds to the wreck of souls that have gone to their destruction, without a hand stretched out to save them! Lois, I go to seek your sister Annie, and I will never rest, or cease to

labour with my whole life's strength, if need be, till I have found her, and can hope to yield her up to you, at our next awful meeting, a penitent and pardoned soul; and you, Lois, forgive, forgive my cruel brother.'

She stooped down as she spoke and kissed the cold white face, then reverently covered it, and with a few words of thanks to the fisherman and his wife, went out once more into the dark silent night.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LAST RESTING-PLACE.

THE very first step which Ernestine felt she must take in her self-imposed mission for the rescue of Annie Brook, was one which jarred upon her natural sensitiveness to the utmost degree. She knew of but one means of obtaining immediate information concerning her, and that was through her brother's servant, Fenton. She was aware that he must leave Seamount next morning, therefore her first act on returning from the fisherman's cottage was to send for this man, whose true character she instinctively understood, in order to speak to him on the very last subject she would ever have wished to mention to him.

Most thoroughly astonished assuredly was Fenton, when, having appeared in the lady's presence, he found himself called upon to state what he knew of Lois Brook's sister. How it came to pass that the refined, gentle Miss Courtenay touched on such a subject, was

a mystery to him ; but he could not if he would have avoided her calm, grave questions. He told her all he knew ; how he had seen Annie Brook, a girl of seventeen, at Colonel Courtenay's villa at Richmond for one day only, and how he had himself helped her into the phaeton when she left it with a friend of the Colonel's.

‘ Who was this man ? ’ asked Ernestine.

Fenton looked for one moment at the clear eyes that were turned anxiously towards him, and answered shortly, ‘ Mr. Brown, ma'am.’

‘ Mr. Brown ! ’ repeated Ernestine thoughtfully. She could not recollect ever having heard George speak of a friend of that name ; but he might have many friends she knew nothing about, especially such as were beneath his own rank in society, as she inferred from the name this Brown probably was. It was rather a relief to her to conclude that such was the case. If, in her search for Annie, she were forced, even in the remotest degree, to come in contact with this man, it would at least be a comfort to know she would not risk meeting him again afterwards in her ordinary routine of life.

‘ Do you know where the girl went to ? ’ she continued, forcing herself to conclude the task of questioning the servant, which became each moment more repugnant to her.

‘Not at first,’ he replied; ‘but I know that afterwards she was at Greyburgh, for the Colonel’s girl, Lois, sent a box to her which had been left behind.’

‘Do you suppose she is still there?’

‘I cannot say, ma’am. I know Mr. Brown is not, for I saw him in London not long since; but it is very likely the girl is. Greyburgh is just the place for such as—’

‘That will do,’ interrupted Ernestine, in a manner which made Fenton close his lips suddenly and turn to the door. ‘Of course you know Mr. Brown’s address,’ said Ernestine hastily, as he was going out.

‘I do not, ma’am,’ he answered with sudden energy; ‘I have not the least idea where Mr. Brown is to be found.’

‘Very well, you can go;’ and, as he finally vanished, Ernestine threw herself into a seat and hid her face in her hands.

‘It is sickening,’ she murmured to herself; ‘but oh! if I can but save that one immortal life, what will it all signify! if I can only bring one ransomed soul to plead for George at the bar of judgment, because for his sake she was sought and found. No—nothing I may have to bear shall stop me; I will find her, so help me God, though I have to spend my life in the search.’

Then she proceeded quietly to mature her plans on the information she had received. She was very glad to find that Greyburgh was the place to which in all probability she would have to go in pursuit of Annie; for her brother Reginald was at college there, and she had already been intending to go and see him, as there had been a tone of hopeless despondency in his letters for some time past which had filled her with anxiety. His health had been delicate ever since the severe illness through which she had nursed him, and it was plain that he was far from well, although it was chiefly the evidence of mental pain and unrest which had alarmed her. Ernestine could not help hoping, however, that Annie Brook might be found before she went to Greyburgh. If the man who had stolen her from her God and her home were no longer there, it seemed improbable that she would remain. Surely, in the misery of her desertion, she would fly back to the friends of her childhood, and at once be found under the shelter of her father's roof; but Ernestine little knew what temptations surround such helpless children as the girl she sought to save, and that Matthew Brook's cottage was the last place where she should expect to find her. There she resolved to go first of all, trusting that if she did not actually meet her, she should at least hear

where she might be found. Before she took even this step, however, in the task which lay before her, there were certain formidable preliminaries to be gone through.

Ernestine knew, as we have said, that she could not commence a search for one whose very existence would be ignored in the society she frequented, without departing very far from the conventionalities of a well-born lady's ordinary routine of life; and to do so even in the smallest degree would be to commit a heinous offence in the eyes of Lady Beaufort,—the aunt with whom she had lived previous to Colonel Courtenay's return from India. But Ernestine was five-and-twenty, and at that age she did not hold herself bound to her aunt's views, if even five-and-twenty years out of one short life were not enough to have sacrificed to the stereotyped uselessness of a fashionable young lady's career. The tremendous realities of life and death, of sin and of judgment, which had been brought so vividly before her in the last few days, had given form and distinctness to many misgivings on those points which had been vaguely stirring in her mind for some time past. She was anxious, however, to do what she could to conciliate her aunt; and as she knew Lady Beaufort would expect her niece after Colonel Courtenay's departure, she de-

terminated to go to her in London for a day or two, and endeavour to allay her virtuous indignation at plans she would consider so eccentric, by assuring her that she meant in all her future wanderings, wherever they might lead her, to be accompanied by her former governess, Mrs. Tompson, whose devoted religion to the proprieties of life might satisfy possibly even the refined worldliness of Lady Beaufort.

Her aunt, however, was not the only person to be consulted, nor the one whose approbation was the most dear to her. Ernestine knew that she had given Hugh Lingard a full right to take cognisance of all her actions, and she was far too true and loyal to the engagement which bound her to him, to wish to take any step without his sanction; but she had not the slightest fear that he would withhold it. Not only did he love her so well, that her lightest fancy was sure to meet with entire and tender indulgence from him, but one of the most striking peculiarities of his character was an unbounded liberality and tolerance for the opinions and feelings of others, however various and contradictory they might be. It was a characteristic which gave a singular charm to this man in all social intercourse; but Ernestine had not as yet thought deeply enough on the mysteries of the hidden and inner

human life to perceive from how poisoned a source it sprung.

It had fared with Hugh Lingard as with many thousands of men at the present day, who, like himself, are clever, without being deep thinkers. The misty theological atmosphere of the intellectual society with which his tastes led him to mix, had obscured for him the foundations of the old faith to which in his careless youth he had given a superficial assent; and it suited well with the mental indolence and love of pleasure, which were his greatest failings, to make it his only creed, that it was vain to seek the truth amongst so many conflicting theories and contradictory opinions, and that there was nothing to be done but to make the best of life in its visible aspect, and leave the problem of the grave to be solved by that sure death which had alone the key to it. He thought himself sincere in this negative belief, which left him free to make a god of his own unlicensed will; and he would think and talk with a gentle melancholy of those who rested in surer and brighter hopes, and fancied he envied them. But he deceived himself; for the real obstacle to his seeking and finding—as men of purer souls have done in similar circumstances, the sure ground-work of an intelligent faith—was his distaste to

the mental labour of extracting the truth from the mass of sophistries in which his false teachers had submerged it, and a still greater unwillingness to give up the pleasant vices which he felt could not co-exist with a true religion. For deep in his soul, beneath all his shallow reasonings and many-sided doubts, there was an underlying consciousness of that great principle which has its being in the very nature of the Creator, that by the way of personal holiness all men may arrive at a knowledge of God, and of His truth. 'If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.'

Lingard did not find it very difficult to stifle this conviction, however, which only at rare intervals sent up a flash of unwelcome light into his self-chosen darkness, and he compounded with his conscience by an extensive charity to all forms of belief and error alike, and by indulging the natural kindliness of his disposition, in the relief of suffering so far as he could, whenever it happened to cross his path. He was not one to glorify himself in his want of definite principle, as men of shallower natures are apt to do; on the contrary, he kept his negation of faith, it could hardly be called active unbelief, as much as possible in the back-ground, and the same indolence which rendered him unwilling to probe



the questions modern scepticism had raised, made him ever seek, in his intercourse with others, to ignore the subject of religion altogether.

Ernestine had been won by his generous disposition, his abhorrence of everything mean and petty; his sweet temper and kindly impulses, as well as by the brilliant talents which promised one day to bring him both fame and fortune, and she had taken it for granted that these fair qualities sprung from as pure a creed as that which governed her own existence. She had not then thought so deeply on such matters as circumstances were likely now to make her do, and she was content with that half of his life which was displayed before her; the other half with its deadly vices, its degrading pleasures, its calm selfishness, sacrificing mortal lives and immortal souls at random, for personal gratification, was kept as a spectacle for the eyes of the pure God alone.

Ernestine expected to see Lingard in London, but she felt that she could more easily write than speak on such a subject as that which now engrossed her; and she sat down forthwith to tell him of her future plans. She did not find it very easy to do so, because she could not tell all the circumstances which had led her to her present resolution. Not even to Lingard, her

brother's most intimate friend, and her own future husband, could she bear to betray the hidden guilt of George Courtenay, or the fatal result to his helpless victim; but she told Lingard that circumstances of a most painful nature had brought to her knowledge the history of a young girl, who had been allured from her home and her innocence, and now must in all probability be utterly lost, if no friendly hand were stretched out to save her, and further, that one just dead had indirectly, but yet most positively, imposed upon her the mission of seeking out and rescuing this unhappy child from ultimate destruction. She trusted to be able to accomplish her task quickly and easily, without exciting observation; but if it should take the labour of years, and force her to measures that would be thought unbecoming to her station in life, she still must carry it out to the end, though all the world should blame her,—if only he did not withhold his consent, and this she besought him not to do if he valued her peace of mind. There would not be time for him to answer by letter, as she intended to remain only one day more in Seamount, but she trusted she should see him at her aunt's, soon after her arrival there.

To Lady Beaufort she merely wrote that she was com-

ing to town for one day, and reserved all explanations till they met; and this done she turned her thoughts to the arrangements for Lois Brook's funeral, which was to take place the next day. Ernestine was resolved to be present at it herself. It was but a barren act of kindness to show to one who had had reason to curse the name she bore; but she could not let her be thrust into her dishonoured grave without a human being to stand by in sorrow for the young life quenched in such fatal darkness; and since by George Courtenay's deed, no kindred of her own could show her that last charity. Ernestine, as his representative, would do all that might yet be done to prove that the guilty suicide had once been loved and honoured. The man to whom she intrusted the arrangements for the burial, told her that it could not take place till the evening of the next day; and it was settled that she was to meet the funeral at the churchyard, where it was to be privately brought from the fisherman's cottage, in order to avoid the crowd who were very likely to assemble, under the circumstances, if the hour of interment were known. A long and dreary night followed for poor Ernestine, and a still more dreary day, till in the lingering twilight of a soft spring evening, she made her way to the last resting-place of Lois Brook.

The precautions taken had been quite effectual, and the churchyard was deserted when Ernestine reached it, by all but the sexton, who, having finished his task, was now lazily tolling the bell at long intervals, bent on getting his accustomed fee, even on an occasion so much beneath his notice as the present. There was no other living being among the countless dead, lying all around in their mysterious sleep, excepting two little children, who were playing on the brink of the open grave, with the falling leaves which the night breeze scattered round them.

Ernestine sat down in the shade of a tree to wait the coming of her who should go forth from those walls no more till the death-day of the world itself arrived.

Strange thoughts went surging through her heart as she sat there, thoughts that had never visited her in her existence of calm refinement heretofore. She thought how this young life over which she mourned, this soul, the dread of whose eternal loss burned into her heart with agony, was, after all, but *one*, one of the many thousands who in like manner met with wrong, and ruin, and everlasting perdition at the hands of their fellow-men, hunted down to the grave, and thence to hell, by those who shared their nature and their capacity

for suffering and for joy ; and then she thought of the no less countless numbers who sat by in careless ease, and watched this game of life and death as the Romans of old looked on while the gladiators tore each other limb by limb ; who, if they did not of deliberate purpose deal guilt or misery on those who crossed their path, yet lifted not a hand to save them from more brutal natures, and indirectly preyed on many by following out their one purpose of personal gratification, heedless how far it were attained at the expense of others. She thought how each of these many thousands had but one life given them for a prey in the midst of this evil and suffering world, one life with all its capacity to bless, to curse, or superciliously to ignore the fellow-creatures, like themselves rushing down the steep of time to the unchangeable eternity.

Surely if they but looked on the awful mass of sin and anguish seething round them, the one life given them to use or waste would seem all too little to spend in lessening, in ever so small a degree, that mountain of evil, still rising higher and higher to fill up the measure of iniquity against the day of vengeance. Would the cry of accusation against those who might have saved and did not, be less piercing or less powerful than that which would denounce the very ministers of

sin? Yet how in truth was that one precious life disposed of by the majority of those who deemed themselves righteous, because not actively malevolent in their sphere of influence?

Ernestine lifted her eyes to where the little children played by the open grave; their merry laughter mingling with the deep tolling of the funeral-bell; and it seemed to her that in them she saw the type of those who toyed with life and its passing pleasures on the brink of open graves,—the graves not of mortal ashes but of living souls, buried by cruel hands in a spiritual corruption, from which there may be no resurrection in all eternity; and who could tell but that, unheard by human ears, though echoing mournfully in the courts of heaven, the air was even now full of knells rung out by sorrowing angels for the perishing creatures of the most high God, whose happier children answered the funeral tones with sounds of careless mirth?

Ernestine felt the weight of her own past years of thoughtless ease lie heavy at her heart as she pondered on these things, and she turned with a sense of relief to the thought that she was now about to do her best to rescue one at least of that vast multitude, whose everlasting ruin would be charged on their fellow-men. It was to be with Ernestine, as with all who in any way

are roused to definite action with reference solely to the unseen life ; the one earnest purpose, the positive recognition of eternal results from temporal deeds, the true unselfish care for an immortal soul was to develop in her own mind truths but dimly apprehended before, to deepen all that was great and noble in her character, and rouse latent powers within her, which would lead her to such a height of self-devoted love to God and man, as would have made her shrink and tremble now, could she have seen the full revelation of all that was before her.

But the future was hid, and the present only was there, and that present the darkest moment of her life ; for at the churchyard-gate the corpse of her brother's victim was entering slowly, slowly—coming to lie down in the grave his hands had surely dug for her.

The curate, summoned from an adjacent house by the sexton, came hurrying up, fastening his surplice with one hand, while he opened his book with the other. He turned and preceded the coffin, reading the opening sentences of the Burial Office. The men who bore it followed with careless haste, stumbling over the graves, and jostling their poor helpless burden as they walked. The sexton stood waiting, idly kicking stones into the grave. The little children laughed and shouted as the

spectacle for which they had been looking, at last drew near; but not all the indifference or irreverence of the human beings round could destroy the wondrous beauty of the glorious hope, that age after age has blessed the world, in these words, 'I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE,'—words that bind the dying race of man with chains of love to the very Throne of God. They fell on Ernestine's heart that night like fragrant dew on parched and thirsty ground. Yet not without tremor could she hear them; for she knew that to George and to Lois He who spoke them would indeed be the Resurrection, but to which—to either—would He be the Life?

As the coffin was laid by the side of the grave, Ernestine saw that there was one follower at that sad funeral. She could not call him a mourner; for he looked much more as if he would fain have been the avenger; dealing justice on him who had brought the dead to this early doom. It was the fisherman, who stood doggedly at the foot of the grave through the whole service; his hat slouched over his eyes and his hands clenched. As the sexton flung the earth on the coffin, while the curate gabbled over the solemn formula, 'Dust to dust, ashes to ashes,' the fisherman suddenly flung out his hand towards the corpse, and exclaimed, with stern vehemence, 'And may he who wronged and



murdered an innocent girl soon lie rotting in the dust himself.' Ernestine half shrieked, and joined her hands in a voiceless prayer that the curse might be averted; the curate frowned; the sexton angrily ordered him to leave the place, and not interrupt the service; and the fisherman quietly obeyed. But as he turned to go, he pointed to heaven, and said, 'My words 'll come true: the Lord does not sleep when men act like devils.'

The last prayers were said; the curate having, to his no small astonishment, recognised a lady in the solitary mourner at a fallen woman's funeral, bowed to her as he turned away. The undertaker's men gathered up their goods and hurried out of the churchyard. The sexton carelessly shovelled in the earth over the coffin, stamped it down with his feet, and having received from Ernestine a gratuity which made him heartily wish such peculiar funerals took place every day, he hastened home to his supper, driving the little children before him. So finished the closing scene on earth. For the last act of the tragedy we must wait till the curtain rises on the one tremendous spectacle, which every soul that ever lived shall witness.

Life had been very bright to Ernestine Courtenay hitherto; for it had been full of the sweetest joy this world can give, in the love of him most dear to her

on earth. But on this night the weight of its mere responsibility lay upon her heart like lead, as she turned back to the living world, where in every human soul that struggle was still going on, which had terminated in such tremendous loss for the buried corpse at her feet. One last act of duty Ernestine performed before she left. She was anxious that the position of the grave should be recognisable at any future time; for she could not help hoping that a day might come when George Courtenay, sorrow-stricken for the sins of his youth, might learn at that tomb how heavy an accusation was written against him in its mouldering ashes, and make restitution at least in penitence,—since tears of blood, if wept for endless ages, could never give back to the dead the innocence—the life he had destroyed. Ernestine gave orders, therefore, that a simple stone cross should be placed at the head of the grave, with only these words marked on it,—

L. B.

*Veniam supplicat.*

No expression of hope, no holy words from the Book of God dared she write over the grave of the suicide; but surely she spoke an awful truth when she said that the ever-living soul, whether hopeful or despairing, implored forgiveness!

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE OPINION OF THE WORLD.

‘**E**RNESTINE, this is too much!’ said Lady Beaufort, her lips quivering with indignation, as she flung down the last new book and turned to face her niece. ‘A certain amount of eccentricity is rather *piquant* than otherwise in these days; it is, at all events, safe, as you are already *fiancée*; but the line you are striking out is perfectly unheard of. Anything which trenches on the *convenances* of society is quite out of the question; you are much mistaken if you think it will succeed.’

‘Do you mean as regards pleasing the world in general?’ said Ernestine, looking up with an amused smile.

‘Of course I do,’ replied Lady Beaufort.

‘But that did not enter into my calculations at all,’ said Ernestine; ‘I had no intention of taking up any particular line, I assure you. I have but one purpose, which is to save, if I can, this poor lost child.’

‘Lost child! what absurd sentimentality, to talk in

that way. Society would give a very different name to your extraordinary *protégée*.'

'It does not much matter what name they would give her,' said Ernestine wearily; 'she is too surely a perishing soul.'

'A soul, indeed! much she cares whether she has a soul or not; and if she has, pray what have you to do with it? I cannot imagine how you ever heard of such a creature.'

'If you knew how I did hear of her, aunt, I am sure you would excuse my determination to do what I can for her.'

'I can never excuse your lowering yourself to a pursuit which might perhaps be fitting for the matron of a gaol. The daughter of General and Lady Mary Courtenay scouring the country in search of a—! Really, Ernestine, you ought not to force me even to name such a being.'

'Then don't let us speak of her any more,' said Ernestine.

'Do I understand, then, that you give up this posterous scheme?'

'I cannot; indeed I cannot; you do not know by what a heavy responsibility I am bound to it,' said Ernestine pleadingly. Lady Beaufort started impatiently from her seat, but at this moment the door opened and

Hugh Lingard entered the room. She turned to him with an expression of relief.

‘I was on the point of sending for you, Mr. Lingard, to see if your greater influence would bring Ernestine to reason. I have failed to shake her obstinacy, but you may succeed better. She tells me she has written her intention to you; a singular communication certainly for a lady to make to a gentleman,’ added Lady Beaufort, with a vindictive side glance at her niece, which made poor Ernestine grow crimson to the temples; ‘but since she has not shrunk from introducing the subject, pray do your best to induce her to abstain from shocking her friends and degrading herself in such an extraordinary manner.’ And having successfully fired this last shot, the lady gracefully sailed from the room and disappeared. The first result of her parting speech was that Ernestine, having impulsively held out her hands to Lingard, hid her face on his arm as he sat down beside her, and burst into tears.

‘What, Ernie, darling,’ he said, ‘has a trial at single combat with Lady Beaufort proved too much for you? Well, I am not surprised; I should decline the encounter myself.’

‘It was a combination of painful feelings overcame me for a moment; but I am very glad you came in, Hugh.’

‘So am I ; only you must not wish me away again, if I tell you that I think Lady Beaufort has reason on her side notwithstanding. This Quixotic scheme is really not a fitting thing for you, Ernestine ; I came fully resolved to tell you so.’

Ernestine started up, and dashed the tears from her eyes. ‘Oh, Hugh, don’t say so,’ she exclaimed, her grasp tightening on his hand with convulsive energy ; ‘you can never know how much is bound up for me in this matter, or what a terrible necessity is laid upon me to rescue this girl. She must be saved—she must !’

‘Let her be saved, by all means, if she desires it, which is probably doubtful,’ said Lingard ; ‘but why should you have anything to do with such an one as she is ? Send a policeman after her, or a grim old matron out of a Refuge ; only don’t you mix yourself up with an affair of this kind.’

‘Hugh,’ said Ernestine, lifting her clear earnest eyes to his face, ‘it is I who have been commissioned to do it ; commissioned by one now lying cold in her grave ; destroyed by her own hand, because none ever sought to save her, as she bids me save this child. I will tell you this much, and I know you will not ask me more : He through whose means destruction and misery has come upon the girl I seek, is very near and dear to me.

He can do nothing now to check the results of his evil deeds spreading far and wide, where he little dreamt they would extend; and on me it has fallen, by a solemn retribution, to represent him in the effort to make what little atonement may yet be possible, for all the ruin and wretchedness he has caused.' Her voice became choked with sobs as the cold white face of the drowned girl seemed to pass before her; and she remembered how, in the very death-agony, Lois's one prayer had been, that George Courtenay would save her sister. Struggling to retain composure, she went on: 'I think, perhaps, you imagine I am going to act in a much more unusual manner than I really am. I will tell you just what I mean to do: I am going into the country to see the girl's father first, and if I do not find her with him, which is possible, I have reason to think she may be at Greyburgh. Now, you know I had been intending to go there to see Reginald at all events; so there will be nothing strange in my doing so, although, when there, I shall do my very utmost to find this unhappy child.'

When Ernestine had said this much, Lingard imagined that he understood the whole story. One 'near and dear to her' could only, he felt sure, be one of her brothers. Reginald was at Greyburgh, and it was there

she was going to look for the girl, therefore there was no question that it was to him she alluded. Lingard knew that he was very ill, and that he was of a sensitive, gentle disposition, so that it was very likely some sudden remorse had seized him, which was reacting upon his equally sensitive sister. The suicide of which she spoke was no doubt that of some companion of Reginald's *protégée* which had deepened the impression on both their minds. It seemed all very clear to him, and having settled the facts to his own satisfaction, he proceeded to deal with them after the fashion of the society which was his world.

‘Ernestine,’ he said, ‘I can quite understand how all this appears to you; but your ideas are far too high-flown and ecstatic for this practical world. Such cases are more common than you think, and no one but yourself would imagine that the circumstances laid any responsibility on you. If every one, whose friends were implicated in an affair of this kind considered it their duty to act as you propose, there would be occupation of a curious description for very many persons as little suited to it as you are. There is a substratum of this sort of thing underlying society everywhere, and it is only because this case has chanced to crop up to the surface, that you give it such undue importance. You



must consider, my darling, that this girl is, in the first place, probably quite satisfied with her mode of life, and unwilling to leave it; and that even if she were not, she is but one of many thousands in exactly the same position. You are not going to carry a crusade through the whole of them, and why should you compromise yourself for one only, out of a tribe better ignored altogether?’

‘One only,’ said Ernestine, a light as from a purer world shining in her eyes as she spoke; ‘but that one an immortal soul that never in all the eternal ages can cease to live, and living to suffer, if in the whole world there is not enough of compassion found to save her from a doom of such unimagined horror; one only, but that one so unspeakably precious in the sight of the God who made her for Himself, that we know His beloved Son would have come down from heaven to die in His awful agony for her alone, had she only of all the human race been perishing and sinful. You speak of thousands like her. Is it not enough to crush one’s very soul with horror to think of what they are in the sight of the Righteous Heaven, and shall be, too probably, for ever? And the thought that it is their own fellow-creatures who have thus blasted their souls with eternal ruin, makes one wonder that God should still

withhold the fire which one day must justly burn to ashes a world so cruel and so polluted. And can you think, Hugh, that apart from the judgment which will fall on the active agents in the ruin of the thousands of whom you speak, there will be no account demanded of their blood from those who were passive instruments in their destruction, who might have helped, who might have saved them, and *would not*?—on such as I am, who ought to be ready to give my whole life to win all and any I could? Am I to abstain from rescuing one, one actually given into my hand, because some painful humiliation, some bitter censure, may come to wound my vanity, from those who make this world's approval the idol of their worship? Oh, what will all that world be to me when I am lying cold and stiff in the grave, whence there is no return! How more than worthless in that time of silent waiting will be its praise or blame,—the praise or blame of those who will be dust and ashes like myself. But will not the doom of that one lost soul be everything to me,—the soul that will meet me at the bar of judgment, and cry out against me, “You might have saved me, and you did not; therefore you are my condemnation, you my sentence, you my everlasting despair?”’

Ernestine paused, her whole frame trembling with

strong feeling; then she went on with a quiet sadness, which was very touching—

‘ Hugh, I am to be your wife, and I will not now do anything which you could afterwards regret your wife had done. If you absolutely require me to give up the effort to save this most unhappy child, I will do so; and I will not vex you with any expressions of regret when the matter is once settled; but just now, while it is still an open question, while her fate still hangs in the balance, I cannot keep back from you, that I do so strongly feel the obligation laid upon me in her behalf, that if I now abandon her, I shall bring a lasting grief and remorse upon myself, which not all the happiness I look for in my life with you, will have power to banish. I shall never be able to forget her going down to the grave and to her terrible eternity, without one voice to warn her, one hand stretched out to save her from uttermost destruction. Hugh, you may think me absurd and romantic if you will, but I know too surely that at the very altar by your side I shall seem to hear the cry of that perishing soul. I shall ever hear it in all the bright days we hope to spend together, and oh, most of all, I shall hear it on my bed of death, when my own life is finished, written down to the last line, and sealed up against the great account, with but one record of her

in all its pages, "I knew that she was perishing, and I left her to perish when I might have saved her."

As Ernestine finished speaking, and bent down her head waiting for his decision, Lingard suddenly started up and went to the window, where he stood for a few minutes silent, struggling with thoughts that were altogether unaccountable to himself. That Ernestine, so good, so innocent—faultless, indeed, in his eyes,—should thus accuse herself of heavy guilt, and expect a life-long remorse because she believed herself a passive agent in the wide-spread evil, wherein he held the most active instrumentality to be but a trifling folly not worth remembering or regretting,—had aroused a tumult in his mind which he could neither comprehend nor resist. For one moment it was as though some lightning flash had revealed a glimpse of the dazzling purity, the awful, uncompromising holiness of that Fount and Essence of all goodness, in which he did not, and even in that hour would not, believe,—while in the same light the true nature of sin in its foul blackness darkened visibly on his sight. For a brief space his soul was in the grasp of truth, and cowered down well-nigh overwhelmed; but the impression was transient. Soon a rush of habitual thoughts and feelings swarmed on his mind; again the shadows closed over the transient

gleam; the ground which for a moment had appeared steady beneath his feet seemed once more to rock to and fro on its insecure foundation, and his mind drifted helplessly back into its wonted chaos of doubts, misgivings, and sophistries, mingled with evil desires and dim aspirations. He was himself again very speedily; but when he turned to come back to Ernestine there was an unusually grave and gentle expression on his face; and the half playful, half bitter sarcasm with which he had treated the matter at first had quite disappeared.

‘Ernestine, I will thwart you no more,’ he said softly; ‘do what good you can in your generation and in your own way, you shall never be hindered by me. What am I that I should stand between your pity and any poor wretch, however degraded she may be?’ and as Ernestine thanked him, with a warmth of gratitude which showed how greatly she was relieved, he bent down to catch every tone of her low sweet voice, seeming to thirst for the assurance that he was thus indirectly associated with her in her loving charity.

‘There is one condition, Ernie, dearest, which I must make with you for your own sake,’ he continued, after a moment’s silence, ‘and that is, that you keep me to a certain extent *au courant* of your proceedings in this

matter ; it is very possible that you may find yourself in some position where you will really require help and advice ; and I shall not be easy about you unless I have the certainty that you will always at least tell me where you are.'

'I will, gladly,' said Ernestine ; 'it will be a great comfort to me ; and you know, Hugh,' she added laughingly, 'I am to have Mrs. Tompson with me. Don't you think there is some chance of the *convenances* being attended to pretty well ?'

'I should think so, indeed. What agonies she will be in as to what the railway porters and cabmen may think of your proceedings, Ernie ! She certainly carries her deference to the world's opinion to the utmost limits of civilisation.'

'Her whole life consists of a representation of her own and her friends' greatness to the vulgar humanity outside,' said Ernestine ; 'but happily she is much too timid and nervous to think of opposing me, so I shall get my own way, Hugh, all the same.'

'And so you ought, my dearest, considering what you are ; but Ernestine,' he added, with a playfulness which veiled a real earnestness, 'don't go and become too good for me ; I am very far from your level now, and I don't wish to find the distance widened between us. I

have a horrible dread that I shall see wings growing out on your shoulders some day, and that you will soar away above me, Heaven knows where.'

'Oh, no fear,' said Ernestine, laughing merrily. 'I think, on the contrary, when I am out in the world on my adventures, I shall always be longing to rush back and hide in a corner beside you; and that is just what I shall do when my quest is over, if only I am successful.'


'Well, now, I want to tell you that I expect to be ready for you sooner than we thought,' said Lingard; and he proceeded to explain to her that his prospects of a more lucrative appointment than that he now held were much nearer their fulfilment than he had supposed, and that he believed their marriage might take place before many months were over.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SEARCH AT CARLETON HALL.

THE next afternoon saw Ernestine Courtenay in a railway carriage speeding away to the pretty village near which Annie Brook's father lived, as lodge-keeper to Lord Carleton. Opposite to her sat Mrs. Tompson, a lady with drab-coloured hair, pinched features, and a thin figure, attired in good taste, but with the most minute attention to the prevailing fashion on all points; there was not a fold out of place in her silk dress or a wrinkle in her irreproachable kid gloves, yet she looked as if made of inferior clay beside her quiet charge, who in her simple garments and unobtrusive demeanour was singularly attractive even to strangers, from the touching sweetness of expression which gave such a charm to her delicate features and soft brown eyes. Ernestine would have valued this gift of winning insensibly on all who saw her, had she known how useful it would prove to her in her future career, but she was too unconscious of self to be aware



of it, and  only wondered how it was that even strangers were so kind to her wherever she went. The twilight was stealing over the earth when they reached their destination, and Mrs. Tompson experienced the first of many shocks she was destined to receive in her attendance on Ernestine, when she found her quite resolved to pass the night at the village inn, in spite of the fact that below the really pleasant rooms assigned to them, there was a very undisguised tap.

‘My dear,’ said Mrs. Tompson, clasping the well-gloved hands, ‘this is quite unheard-of, and most unnecessary. You are acquainted with Lord and Lady Carleton, and their house is, of course, the only suitable abode for you in this place ; you have only to write a note to Lady Carleton, saying you are accidentally passing through the neighbourhood, and would have much pleasure in spending a day or two with her, and you will find her delighted to receive you.’

‘But I am not passing accidentally, and it would not give me any pleasure at all to spend a day with her,’ said Ernestine ; ‘so you see I must not say that ; and besides, I could not possibly stay at their house under the circumstances. Now, let me beg you to order tea, and make yourself quite comfortable, and I shall soon come back to you.’ And before Mrs. Tompson had

time to prepare another speech, Ernestine had closed the door behind her, and soon she was to be seen from the window walking lightly down the village street. Mrs. Tompson did not attempt to follow. She knew perfectly well that Miss Courtenay would not be deterred from doing what she thought right; and a secret instinct seemed to tell her also that her actions were regulated by a somewhat higher code than her own. So she proceeded to establish what she was pleased to term her 'weak frame' on the horse-hair sofa; and in a painful combat between the angularities of the 'frame' and those of the sofa, she found enough to occupy her till Ernestine's return.

Meanwhile Ernestine Courtenay was walking quickly along the pleasant country road which led to Carleton Hall. She had no difficulty in finding her way, according to the directions given to her, and soon came in sight of the pretty rustic lodge, with its trim garden, where the gatekeeper lived. It stood almost in a nest of bright spring flowers, the walls covered with trailing plants; in front of it lay the park, where the deer were browsing quietly; behind it rose noble trees and luxuriant shrubberies, glowing with the beautiful but evanescent hues of the opening year, and over all was the tender light of the sunset sky, where the evening star shone

pure and pale in its ethereal solitude. Ernestine leant against the gate for a few moments, looking round on the sweet peaceful scene ; and she thought sadly how, but a few years before, Lois and Annie had dwelt there as innocent children, and how they played in their careless glee upon that fair green grass, and slept the sleep of guileless hearts beneath that cottage roof ; but now !—by her brother's evil deeds the one was laid in the dust of death, and the other buried in a corruption worse than that of the grave. The mournful recollection nerved her to proceed with her task, which she felt was, even in this first step, very difficult.

Matthew Brook must be aware of Lois's fate by this time, as she had been told that the coroner had written to him with full particulars. He knew now, therefore, even if he had not known it before, that Colonel Courtenay was the cause of her death ; and Ernestine felt that she could not venture to cross Brook's threshold if there was any chance of her being known as that man's sister ; but this did not seem likely ; while, on the other hand, she feared he might resent an entire stranger speaking to him of the disgrace of his children. Ernestine had been very little amongst the poor, or she would have known that there was small chance of their having such refined and sensitive feelings

as she would have had in a matter of this kind. There was enough, however, to make the visit really formidable to one of her sympathetic nature, and her courage would almost have failed her had she not thoroughly counted the cost when she undertook her mission, and prepared herself for many a painful moment in the course of it.

She went up to the door and knocked gently. It was opened by a woman, with a child in her arms and another clinging to her skirts. She had a pleasant, but somewhat expressionless face, with a worn, fatigued look, as if she had found the cares of matrimony rather too oppressive.

‘Can I speak to Matthew Brook?’ said Ernestine, addressing her.

‘Surely, ma’am,’ said the woman, curtsying as she recognised ‘one of the gentlefolk’ in her visitor; ‘he is just a-sitting down to his supper; please to walk in;’ and she ushered her into a neat tidy cottage, where, at a little round table, placed before a blazing fire, her husband sat with a plate of bread and cheese beside him, and two or three children clustering round him. He rose as Ernestine entered, and turned towards her a hard weather-beaten face, with strongly marked features, and considerable sternness of expression; but he bowed respectfully,

and begged her to sit down. His wife, who seemed at least twenty years younger than he was, brought forward a chair, told the children to mind their manners and stand out of the way, and in another moment Ernestine found herself placed in front of Lois Brook's father, who sat silently waiting for her to speak.

‘I must ask you to excuse my intruding upon you,’ said Ernestine, with the gentle courtesy which is too often considered an unnecessary luxury for the poor, even in their own houses, ‘but I have come on a very painful errand.’

Brook looked up keenly at her.

‘You have heard, doubtless,’ she went on to say, her voice trembling, ‘of the sad death of your child, your daughter Lois?’

The man's face darkened like a thunder-cloud. ‘I have heard of the death of Lois Brook,’ he answered, ‘but she is no child of mine. From the day that she crossed that door-step to go to her disgrace, I have counted her a stranger to me, and so she is now when her shame has been made public. She is no child of mine.’

‘Oh, surely still your child!’ said Ernestine. ‘She has done very wrong, and she has suffered cruelly for it, but she is what God made her—your own child?’

‘No,’ he said, striking his clenched fist on the table beside him, ‘I won’t have her called so ! She was told what she had to expect if she ever disgraced herself, and she knew I would never go back from my word. I gave my children a good home, and brought them up respectable. I taught them their duty, and took them to church, and stinted myself that they might have the best of schooling, and they knew that so long as they did well they’d share every bit I’d got ; but I told them, ay, and swore it to them, times on times, that so surely as they took to evil ways, and brought disgrace on themselves and me, they’d have to tramp for it, and they might seek a home and a father where they pleased, for they’d find none in my house never no more. So I said then, and so I says now to these children here,’ he added, stretching out his hand towards two pretty little fair-haired girls, ‘the same as I said it to them as is gone, and I’ll keep my word to one and the whole of them, they may depend on it.’

‘You have just reason to be angry,’ said Ernestine ‘but the fault was not all Lois’s. She was deceived and cruelly deserted ; the treatment she met with drove her to her dreadful death.’

‘No doubt,’ said Brook grimly, ‘and the fine gentle-

man as ruined her will have to pay for it in kingdom come, if all is true as the parsons tell us. But that is no excuse for Lois. I taught her her place, and she knew she had no business to go looking after any grand gentleman, or to let him come swaggering here to play with an honest girl's good name when her father's back was turned. I told her what stuff such as he were made of, and what fine sport it is to them to take a decent man's daughter and make her only fit, as they think, to be trampled under their feet, and then flung away to die in a ditch. Yes, yes, I know, and I warned Lois of them; what she did, she did with her eyes open, and she must e'en abide by it.'

'She must indeed,' said Ernestine; 'for we can neither help the dead, nor speak forgiveness to them, however sorely they may need it. But I only mentioned Lois, because I wished to tell you what her last desire and prayer in this world were.'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' said Brook's wife; 'but were you with the poor wench when she died?'

'O no,' said Ernestine sadly; 'God alone saw her last agony.'

'Stupid! how could she be,' said Brook angrily, 'when you know the girl went and drowned herself in the night,'—and Ernestine could see that there was

strong agitation working under his apparent harshness.

‘But if I guesses right, ma’am,’ he continued, turning to Ernestine, ‘you are the lady that put her in the ground, and saved her a work’us funeral?’

‘Yes,’ said Ernestine; ‘it was the only thing I could do for her, and I was very pleased to do it.’

‘And I thank you for it, I will say that; bad as Lois has behaved to me, I am glad that she who was once known as my daughter was not buried like a work’us tramp. I do thank you for that, ma’am; and I am bound to listen to anything you may have to say, though what’s the good of talking or thinking of such a black business, I can’t tell, I’m sure,’ and he writhed uneasily from side to side as he spoke.

‘But it is of the living, not the dead, I have come to speak to you now,’ said Ernestine. ‘Lois left a letter, which fell into my hands, in which she made the most earnest entreaty that her sister Annie might be sought for and saved from such a fate as hers had been.’

Brook started at the name, and clenched his fist violently.

‘Annie!’ he thundered. ‘She is as dead to me as the other is, and more so, for the grave where Lois lies can tell no tales, but while Annie lives, her shame



would fall back on me if I still owned her for my child. I would not so much as hear her name from any but yourself, ma'am, and it is not a bit of good your talking of her; better not, far better not.' There was an appealing look under all the fierce anger of his eyes, as he turned them on Ernestine, which convinced her that this child had a firmer hold on his heart than ever Lois had, and that the struggle with his own feelings obliged him to take refuge in greater violence.

'Just let me tell you what I have to say, and I will trouble you no more,' said Ernestine gently. 'I resolved, when I read the heart-breaking letter poor Lois wrote on behalf of her sister, that I would never rest till I had fulfilled her last dying wish, and rescued Annie from a life of sin, and a death of misery. I gave her my promise that I would do so, as I held her cold hand in mine, and I will keep my word, though it was given to a silent corpse. Let it cost me what it may, I will never cease my efforts for your poor lost child till I have brought her back, if I can, to her Father in heaven, with whom is all mercy and forgiveness. It is for this purpose I have come to you. I thought I might have found her here, or that you might know where she is.'

'Here!' exclaimed Brook. 'She shall never enter this

house till I am carried out of it feet foremost. I know nothing of her, nor I don't want to.'

'O do not say so,' exclaimed Ernestine. 'If only I can find her and bring her back to penitence, where should she come but to her father's house? and indeed, from all I have heard, I feel sure she was far less to blame than Lois was: she quite believed her sister was married, when she went to her, and had no idea of the evils and temptations that awaited her.'

'Then she believed Lois's false words more than my true ones,' said Brook. 'I told her plain enough what Lois was, and she knew I had disowned her, and would serve her the same if she followed in her sister's steps. She knew this well, and she left my house unbeknown to me and without my leave, and went to her worthless sister; and now as she has made her bed, so she may lie on it.'

'I do not mean to excuse her,' said Ernestine; 'but she was young and unsuspecting, and her sister, whom she loved so much, persuaded her to come. At all events, whatever may have been her fault in the past, don't say you will refuse to take her in, if I can bring her back to you repentant.'

'But I do say it, and I will,' he replied, smiting the table fiercely. 'Find her if you can, and do your best

with her. It is good of you to trouble yourself for such a one as she is, and I won't say but what I am thankful to you for it, but never let me hear her name, or see her with the sight of my eyes inside of this house. She shall not come while I am alive to bar the door against her.'

'Your own child!' said Ernestine. 'Will you not show mercy, as you hope for it yourself? What would become of any one of us if our Father in heaven so took vengeance on our sins?'

'I have other children, to consider besides her,' said Brook doggedly.

'But they are so young they could not suffer any harm from intercourse with her.'

'They are not too young to suffer the loss of their home and their livelihood, and that is what it would come to if I brought a fallen woman into this house, be she twenty times my daughter.'

'How is that possible?' exclaimed Ernestine. 'Who could have the right to prevent you doing as you like in your own house, and with your own child?'

'Those to whom the house belongs, and whose money buys my children's bread,' said Brook. 'I must do what pleases my Lord and my Lady, or leave the house and the money to another lodge-keeper. There's many a one would be glad to step into my shoes—ay, and many a

one watches to see me make a false move, that they may get into them.'

'But Lord and Lady Carleton would never object to your receiving your daughter, if she were really penitent, and came to your house only to seek a shelter from sin and temptation.'

'Would they not? Did they not send and tell me when Lois went, and again when Annie left, that if ever one or the other of them was seen within the park-gates I should be turned out without a day's notice? Did not Mrs. Brace, the housekeeper, in her silks and satins, bring me the message herself, and sit there as proud as a peacock, tossing her head and speaking of my girls as if she would not touch them with a pair of tongs, let alone my Lady? And I'd like you to tell me, ma'am,' continued Brook, turning round and putting his elbows on the table, while he looked full at Ernestine with a strangely sinister expression,—'I'd like you just to tell me how it is, that among you gentlefolks what is thought a shameful sin in a poor girl is neither a sin nor yet a shame in a fine gentleman? At the very time Mrs. Brace brought me my Lord's and my Lady's message, Colonel Courtenay, the grand swaggering Colonel that ruined my pretty Lois, was staying at the Hall courting my Lady's niece, Miss Julia Talbot; and who so civil to

him as my Lord, and who so pleased to see him as my Lady? And they knew just as well as I did that my child's ruin lay at his door, and that his sin was the same as hers, to say the least of it,—for I take it his was something the blackest of the two,—anyhow, the one was as bad as the other; but she was not to dare to show her face within her father's door, at the risk of bringing us all to the work'us, while he was to ride with my Lady in her carriage, and sit with my Lord at his table, and have the whole house at his beck and call like master and more.' Brook paused a moment, still looking fixedly at Ernestine, and then said, 'Ma'am, our parson tells us that God Almighty knows all things: I should just like to know whether He knows these things, and if He does, what HE thinks of them?'

Ernestine bent down her head, unable for the moment to make him any answer, so keenly did the truth of his words strike home to her sense of right. She had felt her brother's guilt heavily enough, as her present conduct testified, and the general injustice of the world in the matter had struck her, as she stood by Lois's dead body; but the whole dreadful subject was of course entirely new to her, and it was the first time that her eyes had been opened to the practical working of the conventional law which visits sins of this description

without mercy on the woman, the weaker sinner, while it leaves honoured and unscathed the man who has destroyed her. Ernestine shuddered as she thought how these things would appear when weighed in the balance of immaculate justice, but she had too much conscientious courage to gloss over the truth now, even to the hard man before her. She looked up at him with her candid eyes, and said, ‘It is a most cruel injustice; but you may be sure it is one which is hateful in the sight of the righteous God, and for which He will surely require us to give account in our final trial. I still think, however, that Lady Carleton would not refuse to let you give your daughter Annie a shelter, if she were really penitent; now especially, when poor Lois can claim no more pity from either her or you. At all events I will see her to-morrow and try to gain her consent, provided you will promise me that if she does agree, you will not persist in your refusal to give the poor child a home.’

‘It is of no use to ask her, ma’am; you may save yourself the trouble.’

‘Still I may succeed; only say that if I do, and if I can bring Annie back to you, you will receive her.’

‘Well, if you would take her by the hand, so that folk should not think she was altogether lost, I won’t

say but what I might,' said Brook; 'but there—it is no use thinking of it. I know well enough what your answer will be at the Hall.'

'Still I have your promise,' said Ernestine, rising, 'and I thank you sincerely for it, as indeed for your patience in listening to all I had to say. One question more I must ask: can you give me any idea where Annie is now?'

'None at all; I know nothing of her,' said Brook, relapsing into his sullen manner.

'Then she has never written to any of you?' asked Ernestine.

'She knew better than to do that,' said Brook. 'She'd have had her letter back just as she sent it. No, the last I can tell you of her is this: she stood there the night afore she left us, as pretty and innocent a little maid as ever you'd wish to see. She stood there looking at me, and I could see tears in her eyes, and I thought she were fretting because I had spoken a bit sharp to her for loitering about the gate; but I little thought she was giving just these few tears to the father and the home she would never see again.'

'Oh, don't say never!' exclaimed Ernestine. 'I must hope she may yet return to be a comfort to you, and all the more dutiful, because she has once fallen so

far. If I succeed with Lady Carleton, I will come and tell you ; if you do not see me, you will know I have failed.'

'I shall not see you,' said Brook determinedly.

'In that case I must do the best I can for Annie without your help ; but I hope better things from Lady Carleton.'

Ernestine then took her leave, bending so tenderly over the children as she bade them farewell, that both Brook and his wife seemed touched. He took off his hat as he opened the gate for her, with a degree of genuine respect, which was very different from the conventional civility he usually showed to visitors at the Hall. Ernestine had gone some way down the road, when she heard a rapid step behind her, and turning she saw Brook's wife hastening after her. She came up breathless.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I think this may help you to find our Annie,' she said, holding out a water-colour portrait of a young girl. 'A lady who was staying at the Hall once, thought her so pretty that she made this likeness of her, and her father can't a-bear to see it, so I hid it away, and never thought of it till you was gone.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Ernestine, taking it ; 'it will help me very much indeed. Is it really like her?'



‘It is just her very self,’ said Mrs. Brook, ‘only it was the lady dressed her up with flowers that way; her father would never have let her wear them so,’ and taking leave once more, the woman went back to her cottage.

Ernestine stood looking at the drawing in the fast failing light; it was skilfully executed, and represented a girl not more than sixteen, with a sweet childish face, lovely in its look of happiness. Large eyes, of that limpid blue we see only in the early morning sky, sunny hair falling in bright waves from under a wreath of lilies of the valley, and lips parted in a smile of playful archness, combined to represent the very type of light-hearted innocence, and of girlish beauty undimmed by blight or shadow. As Ernestine gazed sadly on it, she felt her very soul rise up in indignation against the man who, in his selfish wickedness, had for ever marred this fair creation of the God of goodness, and darkened all that guileless loveliness with the ineffaceable stains of guilt and shame. That face, so bright with the sunshine of a soul unawakened yet to sorrow or to evil, was indeed blotted out from the very universe; since the best she could now hope for was to see one day those clear blue eyes looking sorrowfully out through penitential tears, and those smiling

lips quivering with anguish, as they confessed the sin, repented bitterly, but never to be undone. It seemed to her a very marvel, that even the world's code of justice should impose on society so cruel a wrong as that which Brook's words had brought home so forcibly to her mind. If there were to be any distinction in the sin, the punishment, and the degradation of Annie Brook and her betrayer, surely the heaviest burden should fall on the mature man of the world, and not on the frail ignorant child, who knew neither trial nor temptation till he lured her from the shelter of her father's roof.

## CHAPTER X.

### LADY CARLETON'S DECISION.

IT was with ineffable satisfaction that Mrs. Tompson heard next morning of Ernestine's intention to visit Lady Carleton, although assured that she did not intend to spend more than an hour at the Hall. This was sufficient to enable the anxious chaperon to mention the fact before the innkeeper, in such terms as should convince that functionary that Miss Courtenay's proper abode had been in the aristocratic mansion, and not in his own ignominious dwelling.

'So distressing to reflect on what he must have thought of us !' she said to Ernestine.

'Who ?—the innkeeper ?' Ernestine answered, laughing, 'I cannot say I have reflected about him at all ; but now I shall go at once to Lady Carleton, as I am anxious we should start for Greyburgh in time to reach it to-night. I have not heard from Reginald this morning as I expected, and I begin to fear he is seriously ill.'

Ernestine found Lady Carleton at home, and to her

great relief there was no one with her but her sister, Miss Verney, a lady *d'un certain âge*, who was reported, according to the phraseology of her set, to have become 'serious,' since the fatal lapse of years had caused her matrimonial ambition to descend from the marquises and earls of her earlier hopes, to the rectors and widowers, who were now, so far as she was concerned, the only game in season.

Lady Carleton received Ernestine with the utmost cordiality. Their previous acquaintance had been slight, but Colonel Courtenay had been very intimate at the Hall, where he had first met his wife; and it would have been music to Mrs. Tompson's ears to have heard Lady Carleton's pressing invitation to Ernestine to stay and spend a few days with them.

'Thank you very much,' said Ernestine, 'but I have only an hour to spare. I must hasten on to Greyburgh to see my brother Reginald, who is ill. My object in coming here to-day was to ask you a great favour,' she added, looking up into the calm expressionless face that was turned towards her.

'I trust I may be able to do anything you wish,' said Lady Carleton.

'I am afraid the subject is one which may be disagreeable to you,' said Ernestine, colouring painfully,

‘but my request may really involve the whole future welfare of a very unhappy person.’

‘Going to ask for a subscription,’ thought Miss Verney; ‘she need not come to me, while the dear Vicar of Dulton’s new aisle is unfinished.’

‘I have heard,’ Ernestine went on, ‘through some very painful circumstances, of a young girl named Annie Brook, the daughter of one of your lodge-keepers, and it is on her behalf I have come to speak to you.’

Lady Carleton’s face grew rigid. ‘My dear Miss Courtenay, you cannot be in the least aware what sort of a person this individual is, or you would certainly not wish to mention her to me or to any one.’

‘I know too well what she is,’ replied Ernestine; ‘and it is because the strongest efforts are about to be made to rescue her out of her dreadful life, that I come with a request to you. If these efforts should succeed,’ she went on hurriedly, ‘if she should become truly repentant, and only anxious to hide from those who have known her otherwise, will you allow her father to give her a shelter in his house again? He is quite willing to take her, if you do not object.’

‘If Brook leaves my service, he will naturally do as he pleases. I shall have no control over him. Of course, you do not propose a person of bad character

venturing within a lodge on our property ?' said Lady Carleton, with the utmost stiffness.

' Only if she were altogether penitent and changed, wishing nothing but to live a humble, unnoticed life. Brook cannot give up his situation without bringing his other children to want and misery ; so that if he received her at all, it must be here ; and it would seem too cruel to refuse her the shelter of her father's roof, if she were seeking to fly from a life and a future so dreadful as hers is now.'

' Are you aware, Miss Courtenay, that Brook's lodge is actually within our own gates, inside the park, and that my sister and I and our guests sometimes take shelter there from a shower of rain ?'

' But you need hold no intercourse with this poor child,' said Ernestine eagerly ; ' and, after all, how many there are whom we meet in society, at least among men, whom we have far more reason to shun than a miserable girl who has been the victim of such as they are.'

It was with something more than coldness that Lady Carleton answered now : ' Miss Courtenay, I am really totally unaccustomed to discussions on subjects of this nature.'

' Had I not better leave the room ?' interrupted Miss Verney, rising with an air of injured innocence.

‘Pray do nothing of the kind, Lorina,’ said Lady Carleton hastily; ‘Miss Courtenay will not, I am sure, continue so very unpleasant a conversation. I do not know from what theories you may draw your ideas,’ she added, addressing Ernestine, ‘but mine are those which have been always received in society, and I can in no way depart from them; allow me to decline pursuing the subject further.’

There was nothing more to be said, and after a few constrained speeches on indifferent subjects, Ernestine rose to go.

The cold politeness with which the ladies who had received her so cordially now took leave of her, was the first indication of the truth which was to meet her at every turn, that she could not unscathed run counter to the opinion of the world, however false and godless that opinion might be. Ernestine was not indifferent to the painful knowledge thus acquired. No one, especially no woman, can brave the censure of the class to which she belongs, without being made to feel it keenly; nor does the righteousness of the cause which has made her depart from received opinion, prevent her from growing daily more sensitive to the blame she has provoked. She may be, as Ernestine was, too unselfish to forsake the truth and the right, because her defence of it brings

the world's contumely on her head ; but the harsh judgment that will assail her, the unworthy motives that will be attributed to her, the misconceptions and exaggerations which her every action will call forth, must gradually make her shrink more and more into herself, till she finds herself happiest in the isolation to which she has involuntarily exiled herself. As yet Ernestine anticipated nothing of this, nor of far deeper pangs which her present course was one day to cost her ; and she tried to shake off the feeling of humiliation and wounded pride which her interview with Lady Carleton had left on her mind. The sight of Brook's lodge was efficacious at once in chasing away all thoughts of self. As she drew near it she could see that he was standing, hidden, as he thought, by the muslin curtain of the lattice-window, watching her eagerly as she came down the avenue. She felt he was waiting to see if her errand had been successful, and if he might take home the lost child towards whom his indifference had been so much more assumed than real. She knew well she had not a hope to offer him, and she passed his door with her head bowed sadly down, and her heart aching with that strong sense of the injustice of men's dealings one with another which strikes us sometimes with such painful acuteness.



Mrs. Brook came out to open the gate for her, and looked inquiringly in her face,—

‘I suppose the poor wench is not to come home, ma’am?’

‘I am very sorry I have failed to get leave for her; but will you tell your husband that if only I can find her, I will take care that she finds a shelter in some safe home, where I hope he will come and see her?’

‘God bless you, ma’am. I am right glad Annie has found a friend in you; she is no child of mine, but she were as sweet a little maid as ever you see, and I can’t help fretting over her when I mind her merry ways, and how she used to go singing about the house like a bird. There was never a bit of harm in her, ma’am. She were a thought too frolicsome, perhaps; but she was light of heart, poor dear.’

‘I will tell her how kindly you speak of her, if I can find her,’ said Ernestine, pressing the woman’s hand as she turned away to go forward in her search.

## CHAPTER XI.

### GREYBURGH.

ERNESTINE COURTENAY had never seen Greyburgh before, and she now saw it under the circumstances most favourable both to its beauty of outward aspect, and to the teeming associations which gave life and charm to every step within its walls. Its beautiful gardens, its fair meadows, and shady walks, were in all the glory of their fresh spring loveliness; the stately trees that arched over its finest avenue, till it looked like the nave of a glorious cathedral, or dipped their branches in the graceful winding river, were all bright with the luxuriant green that had renewed their youth; and the sparkling waters, covered with gay boats, that went shooting to and fro with their merry crews, glanced along under blossoming shrubberies and violet-covered banks. Side by side with this living nature, this freshness of youth and beauty, rose up in sombre stateliness the dark old colleges, like petrifications of the thoughts and hopes and aspirations of the

long-buried dead,—the glittering sunlight serving only to bring out in stronger relief the deep shadows cast by their massive proportions.

A more striking representation of past and present could scarcely have been imagined. The smiling gardens and sunny river-side were teeming, not with the life of nature only, but with the young life of the present generation in all the promise of early manhood; while, within the solemn colleges, beneath the chapel altars and the sombre corridors, the dead of ages past, the strength and sinews of the nation once, lay mouldering in their forgotten graves. And with this contrast,—the sure knowledge that all the life and brightness of the one must soon dissolve into the gloom and silence of the other, would have been strangely mournful, had it not been that there was a revelation of the future also in the clear blue sky, with its infinite depths of fathomless ether, that arched over living and dead alike, and spoke of an eternity for both.

It was in the radiance of the early morning that Ernestine thus saw Greyburgh for the first time, as she took her way to the college to which Reginald belonged. They had reached the hotel too late the night before to visit him then, but Ernestine had written to tell him of her arrival, and to ask when she could see him, either

at the hotel where she was staying, or in his rooms, and the tone of his answer heightened her anxiety on his account. He wrote thus :—

‘DEAREST ERNIE,—I am very sorry you have come here, and yet I shall be only too delighted to see you. You must come to me,—I cannot leave my rooms. Since you are here, do not delay letting me have you with me a moment longer than you can help. I shall expect to see you as soon as the college gates are open to-morrow morning.—R. C.’

This was all, and Ernestine was greatly perplexed by it. She knew it was no want of affection for herself which made him regret her coming, and she waited with anxiety for the moment when she should be able to ascertain the meaning of the strange state of mind in which he seemed to be. She was at the gate of the college, one of the oldest in Greyburgh, at the hour he had named, and, as she turned into the deep shadows of the quadrangle, with its dark walls and time-worn statues, she felt as if she had stepped from the living world into the realms of the past. Having mastered, by the help of a passing servant, the meaning of the cabalistic direction given her by the porter as to the position of Mr. Courtenay’s rooms—‘two five to the

right'—she made her way up the steep stone staircase to his door.

'Mr. Courtenay sports oak most days,' said the servant, hastening up before her; 'but I can get in, and I will tell him you are here, ma'am.' In another moment he returned, flung open the door, and closed it again upon Ernestine, as she entered a sitting-room, arranged after the fashion of most undergraduates' rooms, though with abundant indication, in the books and papers which strewed the tables, and in the engravings on the walls, that Reginald Courtenay was not one of the fast men of his college. The room was empty, but a half-open door led into another, and Ernestine went in at once. On the threshold, however, she stopped, startled to the last degree at the sight which presented itself. The room was small, like most college bedrooms, and contained little besides the bed and a table covered with books, where a lamp, which Reginald had apparently forgotten to extinguish, still burned with a sickly flame, scarce visible in the bright sunshine that filled the room. Reginald himself sat in a low easy-chair at the open window, gazing out into the clear sky, which alone was visible from it. He did not hear his sister's light step, and she had time to scan the familiar face, so changed, that she scarcely recognised it, before he

turned. It was nearly a year since she had seen him. In the previous long vacation he had gone with a reading-party to Wales, and had, much to her regret, avoided, on some slight pretext, coming to London to see her before returning to Greyburgh in October. When they last met, he had been delicate-looking, as he always was; but the indications of weakness of the chest, which had often alarmed her about him, had been less apparent than formerly. In the interval, he had never said a word about failing health, and had indeed written rarely and briefly, although his letters, short as they were, had betrayed a *malaise*, either mental or bodily, which had caused her a vague uneasiness. And now, as she looked at him, the conviction came upon her, sudden and irresistible, that he was not only dangerously ill, but that he had scarce a few days to live. The shock of this overwhelming impression was so great that she stood transfixed to the spot, scanning in dismay the wasted features, with their unmistakable symptoms of decaying life, and the attenuated figure, lying motionless in the languor of utter weakness. He was but one-and-twenty, and had been remarkable for the refined beauty of his face. It was now white and sharp of outline as if cut in marble, and all that remained to him of life seemed gathered in his dark

eyes, which looked, from his extreme emaciation, unnaturally large, and were glowing with a restless feverish light, that spoke of intense unrest. The heavy masses of his dark hair, damp with the dews of weakness, were pushed back from his hollow temples, as if their weight were too much for him. His parched lips were perfectly colourless, and the thin transparent hands, hanging listlessly down, seemed moulded in wax. He was fully dressed, but the clothes hung loosely on his wasted limbs, and there was a hopeless decay written on every line of the sinking, feeble frame.

An involuntary sob broke from Ernestine, and Reginald turned his eyes upon her. In another instant she was at his side, his dry feverish hands in hers, and her warm kiss pressed on his cold white cheek.

‘Reginald, dearest, surely you are fearfully ill?’

‘Sick unto death, dear Ernie,’ he answered, in a weak, hollow voice. His breath came quick and fast.

‘Oh, why did you not tell me?’ she said, bowing her face on his hands in an agony of grief.

‘Because I did not want to cause you needless pain. Ernie, don’t cry,’ he continued, breathing hurriedly; ‘I cannot bear it; my load is heavy enough already. I have had to look my wretchedness in the face night and day, and it has been as much as I can endure; if

I have to see your misery too, it will drive me distracted.'

He spoke with a feverish excitement, which was evidently too much for him, and Ernestine felt it was absolutely necessary she should control herself. She rose from his side and went into the other room, where she bathed her tearful face in cold water, struggled determinately to regain composure, and, coming back to him with a smile, she took a chair quietly, and sat down beside him.

'There,' she said, 'you shall see no more weakness, Reggie. I am going to be your nurse, and you know a nurse has no business to be hysterical.'

He smiled faintly, as he stroked the soft hair from her face with his wasted hand.

'That is right,' he said. 'I want to see your face calm and sweet as I remember it, when I was ill before. It used often to make me think of a clear, quiet lake reflecting the light of heaven. How the sight of you soothed and refreshed me then, and how I have longed for you since!'

'But then, why not send for me, darling?' said Ernestine. 'Could you suppose it possible that it would not be far more pain to me to know that you had been ill and suffering without me, than to be with you, and try my best to help you?'



‘Yes, because at a distance you would only have known that I was dead—dead of rapid consumption,—and you would have grieved for me, I know, but there would have been no sting in your grief; and now, I fear—I fear,’ he continued, clasping his hands painfully, ‘you will learn all that makes death terrible in my case. I am too weak to control myself; I know that I shall tell you all in some moment of agony. I have cried out to these bare walls sometimes, when the horror of my fate was strong upon me.’

‘I hope indeed you will tell me all,’ said Ernestine, flinging her arms round him; ‘whatever you have to suffer, it must be best that I should share it with you.’

‘Ernestine, you do not know what you are saying,’ said Reginald, with a vehemence which brought on a fit of coughing. When it was over he leant back exhausted. After a few minutes, he said feebly, ‘Ernie, promise me you will never question me. If I am driven to confide in you by my own misery, you must bear the evil; but in the meantime I want to find comfort, if it be possible, in your presence. I don’t want to be always struggling with you. Promise to ask me nothing.’

‘I will promise, dearest,’ said Ernestine soothingly. ‘I have but one wish, and that is to be a comfort to you, if I can, and it shall be in the way that suits you best.’

He looked up to her with a grateful smile. 'Let us talk of something else, then,' he said.

'Well, tell me who is your doctor,' said Ernestine.

'Dr. Compton, the best physician, and one of the most scientific men in the University. So I have all the help that skill can give me, but he has owned long ago that he can do nothing except to give a passing relief. He will be here presently, and you can see him. I have a nurse too, whom he sent me; the best old woman in the world. You must not send her away, Ernie; she has quite devoted herself to me, and she does everything for me which I am too weak to do for myself.'

'I am glad you have got her, but I do not think she ought to have let you get up to-day; I am sure you should have been in bed.'

'My dear Ernie, I have not been in bed all night!'

'Not been in bed!'

'No; it is one of the things I cannot do,' he said, with a shudder; 'it is like lying down in my coffin; it will be soon enough when the time comes; doctor and nurse have both given up trying to make me do it. I asked Dr. Compton if he could logically prove it would signify one atom to myself, or to anything in the universe, if I died a week sooner in consequence of keeping

out of bed, and he could not. Besides, he knows that the horrors which overtake me when I lie down are more injurious to me than the fatigue of sitting up.'

Ernestine was silent from mingled astonishment and distress.

'It seems to me very strange, Reginald,' she said at last, 'that the college authorities did not let some of us know how ill you were. Whether you wished it or not, they certainly ought to have done so.'

'And so they would, if I had not prevented them by a *ruse*, which you would no doubt have thought very wrong. A few falsehoods did it. I told them you and Lady Beaufort were on the Continent, and that I did not know your address, but that I told you myself how ill I was, and you would come as soon as you could. George I represented as being perpetually on his voyage from India,—a pretty little string of lies, was it not?'

Reginald telling falsehoods! Ernestine was utterly amazed. Not only had he been from childhood singularly truthful and honourable, but he had since his illness, a few years before, become deeply religious,—his strong impressions in that respect being very remarkable in so young a man, while the excessive sensitiveness of his conscience had reached a pitch that was almost morbid. He had fully intended to take holy orders

and many a dream of missionary enterprise, of high devotedness and self-denial, had he told to Ernestine, in the days when they had been together. She had already noted that not a word of faith or resignation had passed his lips in speaking of his precarious state; and each moment convinced her more and more that some fearful change had passed over his spirit which was unaccountable to her. They were interrupted by the arrival of the doctor. He came in, a tall fair-haired man, with an intellectual face, and the unmistakable air of a gentleman.

‘I am very glad you are come, Miss Courtenay,’ he said, as Reginald introduced him to her; ‘your brother will tell you it has not been my fault that some of his relations have not been here long ago.’

Ernestine went into the other room to wait till his examination of Reginald was over, and when he joined her there, and closed the door, she looked up at him with tears in her eyes: ‘Dr. Compton, I cannot tell you how shocked and surprised I am at the condition in which I find my brother. I had no idea he was even seriously ill, and I come to find him dying: it is so, is it not?’ she added, with a wistful look, in which a faint hope yet lingered.

‘I fear so, indeed; it would be no kindness to conceal

it. He cannot last many days. He never told his friends of his condition, then ?’

‘Never. His letters gave me the impression that he was out of health, or low-spirited, but there was not a word to indicate serious illness.’

‘I feared as much.’

‘Dr. Compton, what can have brought him to this pass ?’ said Ernestine anxiously. ‘He was always subject to delicacy of the chest, but such a sudden decline, such total prostration, seems to prove that his malady must have been aggravated by some unusual circumstances. He is in a very unhappy state of mind, I can see plainly, though I do not know the cause of it. Do you think that mental disquiet can have increased his illness ?’

‘No doubt it has,’ said Dr. Compton ; ‘I have seen it with pain, but I could do nothing to prevent it.’

‘But what can have caused it ?’ said Ernestine. ‘I can see that his ideas, and even his principles, are completely changed, and his peace of mind is altogether overthrown. What can be the reason of it ?’

A smile, half sad, half amused, passed over Dr. Compton’s face.

‘His is not the only unsettled mind in the university, Miss Courtenay ; but you know that is not my province ;

I only deal with physical difficulties. Mental disturbance has not, however, been the only evil influence in your brother's malady. He lived too fast last term; a strong man could hardly have stood the life he led, far less a youth so delicate as he was.'

'Do you mean that he was dissipated?' said Ernestine, unable in her painful surprise to find a word less crude to express her meaning.

'I fear so,' said the doctor gravely; 'your brother is young, and Greyburgh is a place of great temptation; but the whole circumstances of his case have been very sad, and much to be regretted.'

This put the finishing-stroke to Ernestine's astonishment and dismay. Of course, she had not lived so many years in the world without knowing that of many young men such a report would have been nothing surprising; but that Reginald, only one year before so high-souled, so pure-minded, so full of noble desires and holy aspirations, should have fallen into the low dissipation of coarse animal natures, was indeed an overwhelming astonishment to her.

She was roused by Dr. Compton's voice. 'Here is Nurse Berry,' he said; 'she has been very attentive to your brother; I should advise your leaving him with her for a few hours. I have given him a

composing-draught, and I trust he will sleep. He never shut his eyes last night, and the duration of his life now mainly depends on the amount of rest he can get.'

A tidy motherly-looking woman came curtsying forward as the doctor left the room. She had a pleasant face, with kind, soft eyes, which took Ernestine's fancy at once. She held out her hand to her, as she said warmly—

'Thank you for your kindness to my poor brother, nurse; he is terribly ill, is he not?'

'As ill as he can be, ma'am,' said the nurse, tears filling her eyes, 'and nothing to comfort him no way. My heart has ached for him many a time. I am very glad you are come to him, ma'am.'

'If I had only known he was ill, I should have been here long ago, but there is no help for that now. I must do the best I can for him while he is left to me. The doctor says I must leave him to sleep for the present, but I will come back in a very few hours.'

'The evenings are his worst time, ma'am; if you would come to him then it would be best; he mostly dozes through the day, but his evenings and nights are awful; it is a wonder to me he has not been worn out long before; and so I think he would have been if it were

not for the heavy sleeping-draughts the doctor gives him ; they keep him quiet, in the afternoons at least.'

'I shall come early in the evening, and stay all night with him. I do not like leaving him now, but I must, as the doctor wishes it.'

She went back to Reginald's room. He was lying quiet, with his eyes closed, but slowly raised the heavy lids as she drew near. She bent down and kissed him.

'Dr. Compton tells me I must leave you to sleep for a few hours, darling. I cannot bear to be away from you, but I am coming in the evening to stay all night.'

'Yes, I shall sleep now,' said Reginald, 'and sleep is the one only blessing this life can give me ; but come back, Ernie, come at night, it is then I shall need you. Save me from myself if you can.'

'My Reggie, I would save you from every shadow of evil if I could,' said Ernestine, struggling with her tears. He opened his lips as if to reply, then a spasm of mental pain contracted his features ; he gave an impatient sigh, turned his face to the wall, and closed his eyes. Ernestine slowly left the room, and the nurse, closing the shutters, sat down for her patient watch, which she enlivened by knitting in the dark with marvellous speed.



## CHAPTER XII.

DR. GRANBY.

IT would have been easy for Ernestine to have spent the remainder of that day in bitter lamentations over her brother's untimely fate, and in wearying herself with speculations as to the cause of his evident distress of mind ; but she saw that her attendance on him would leave her little time for the search which had been her chief object in coming to Greyburgh, and that she must each day make use of the few hours when she would not be with Reginald for that purpose, or she would have little chance of success, so far as the lost girl was concerned. Indeed, if anything had been required to make her more earnest in her purpose, it would have been the sight of her brother's young life fleeing away so swiftly into the unknown deep of eternity. Of late she felt the mysteries of death and the unseen had been crowding strangely round her. What if that other soul which had seemed committed to her

hands were even now, like Reginald's, trembling on the brink of its eternal destiny? Surely there is no time in this swift, sudden life, with its startling changes and its terrific power over that which is to come, to sit down and idly weep for the dying or the dead. In the future of the dead is the true existence. There are the countless generations gathered of all that ever breathed, living one and all to God, whether for weal or woe! and those yet abiding in the flesh on earth are but as a handful to that mighty multitude, like the gleanings left upon the vines when the vintage is over, like the autumn leaves lingering on the boughs when the summer wealth has passed away. Soon the rushing wings of time shall sweep them on to join their fellows in the unchangeable and everlasting state. What does aught signify for them, save the seal wherewith their brief probation shall stamp them for that enduring being,—whether reflecting the image of Christ, till the radiance of the Morning Star has been caught in the dim waters of their soul, they pass into the unimagined glory of His presence; or blackening into the likeness of a nature fallen below humanity, they go out to the desolation of that darkness which is exile from Him? This alone is matter of import to any who yet breathe the atmosphere of earth; and is it then a time to waste

the hours in mourning for those whose little day has hastened to its close a few short moments, as it were, swifter than the rest? Oh! to stay the ultimate perishing of souls! to prevent the eternal death, the irremediable destruction,—surely this is the only worthy end, the only momentous object, to which time and thought, and life and energy should be given, while we walk our brief course to the grave!

So at least thought Ernestine Courtenay, as, resisting the impulse to relieve her heavy heart with unavailing tears, she roused herself at once to action on behalf of Annie Brook. The first step to be taken in so wide a search cost her no little thought; finally, she decided on applying to the only person she knew at Greyburgh who would be likely to assist her. One of the largest parishes in the town was under the care of a certain Dr. Granby, who, with his wife, had some time previously spent a few days at a country house where Ernestine was visiting. There had been a large party assembled, Hugh Lingard amongst others, and various of Ernestine's intimate friends, so that she had but a dim recollection of the rector of St. Gregory's and his wife, whom she had never met before. She remembered, however, that they had been exceedingly marked in their attentions to her, and had warmly invited her to visit them if she

ever came to Greyburgh; and she thought it very possible, that Dr. Granby might be able amongst the poor of his own large parish to find some clue to the lost girl she was seeking.

Having left Mrs. Tompson lionizing Greyburgh in the manner she thought most aristocratic, by assuring the guide that the colleges were poor indeed compared to the buildings she had seen abroad. Ernestine therefore started off to enlist Dr. Granby in her service. She passed through the whole extent of St. Gregory's parish, and found that he did not live anywhere near it, but in a villa some little distance from the town. Entering through an iron gate, with two ambitious-looking griffins perched in painful attitudes on the side-posts, she passed up a gravel walk to the house, in front of which was a well-kept lawn. Here two young ladies were engaged in playing croquet, dressed in the most improved costume for that amusement, with impertinent little hats perched on a mass of hair, dresses looped up over full-blown crinolines, like sails reefed for a gale of wind, and high-heeled boots, which were not alone visible under their very short petticoats. A weak-looking curate and a vivacious undergraduate shared in their game, and Ernestine passed into the well-furnished drawing-room, preceded by a footman in livery, where

Mrs. Granby, rustling in the stiffest of silks, rose to receive her. A foreboding took possession of her that this was not an abode where lost or wandering outcasts were likely to be known.

Mrs. Granby received her with the greatest *empressement*, and had very soon informed herself anxiously of the health of every one of Ernestine's relations whose name had a place in the Peerage. Ernestine inquired for Dr. Granby.

'He is well, and will be so delighted to see you,' and Mrs. Granby, ringing the bell, desired that Dr. Granby and the young ladies might be told of Miss Courtenay's visit. Ernestine would thankfully have dispensed with the young ladies, who forthwith arrived through the window, accompanied by the mild curate and the fast undergraduate. More slowly, it may even be said majestically, the rector approached, a large, heavy man, conveying irresistibly the impression of a lifetime of excellent dinners, with a smooth face, a shining bald head, a good-tempered expression, and an elaborately courteous manner. He was profuse in his delight at seeing Miss Courtenay, and the list of titled relations was gone over again; then the conversation turned on the news of the day, with an occasional question from the Misses Granby on the prospects of the London

season, and Ernestine saw that her only hope was to ask the polite rector for a private interview when he went with her to the door. Making her visit very short, therefore, she soon found herself passing through the hall with Dr. Granby.

‘Can I speak to you for a moment alone, Dr. Granby?’ she said hastily, as she saw the footman proceeding to open the door. ‘I want to ask your help in a matter of some difficulty to me.’

‘Undoubtedly, my dear Miss Courtenay, I shall be most happy if I can be of any assistance to you. Allow me’—and, opening the door of a luxuriously-furnished study, he ushered her in, placed a seat for her, and sat down himself in a huge easy-chair, which seemed to enshrine his portly form with the most sympathetic softness. Taking out his white cambric pocket-handkerchief, as if in readiness for any emotion that might arise, he bent forward in an attitude of polite attention, his bald head shining in the sunlight, and his gold-rimmed spectacles beaming with a mild effulgence as he turned them inquiringly on his visitor. Ernestine felt as if she could more easily have faced a colonel of dragoons than this bland ecclesiastic, who looked, in his irreproachable costume and perfect *bien-être*, as if he could never have even heard of such a thing as misery or sin;

but there was no help for it, so with a sort of desperation she plunged into her subject.

‘Dr. Granby, I came to Greyburgh chiefly to try and find a poor young girl, in whom I am much interested, and I do not at all know where to look for her. I have thought that amongst the poor of your large parish you might be able to find some clue to her.’

‘It would depend on any circumstance having brought her under my notice,’ said the rector. ‘Do you suppose she might be one of the pupil-teachers at the school, or amongst the young persons preparing for a confirmation to be held in this church—I mean, in my church—on the twenty-sixth of next month, by the Lord Bishop of the diocese?’

‘O no!’ said Ernestine, colouring painfully; ‘she is not good, not respectable. She was taken from her father’s house by a man—I believe he calls himself a gentleman—who has left her, I fear, to utter ruin.’ The rector of St. Gregory’s drew in his lips in a manner which caused him to give an involuntary whistle, while the gold-rimmed spectacles rapidly mounted up his round forehead, in consequence of the elevation of his eyebrows.

‘My dear Miss Courtenay, if you are quite aware of the style of person you have described, you cannot pos-

sibly suppose I could know her. Of course, I have intercourse with none but respectable characters.'

'But you seek out the lost and erring among your people to try and reclaim them, do you not?' said Ernestine, raising her clear eyes to his face.

'Ahem! within proper limits, certainly; wherever there appears any reasonable hope of my ministrations being successful, and where there is no risk of my sacred person—I mean, my sacred office—being treated with irreverence; but disreputable creatures such as the individual you mention may be said to be sunk beneath the level of reclaimable humanity. It would be most incongruous that I should seek them out, or permit of their approaching me.'

'But I do not believe this case to be beyond hope,' said Ernestine eagerly; 'at least there is the possibility of trying what can be done for her. I only want to find her. I hoped you might have helped me in this, and as it would not be well for her to come to me at the hotel, I thought I might have met her here.'

'In my house!' shrieked the rector. 'My——dear Miss Courtenay,' he added, making a descent upon the affectionate term, to save himself from an exclamation of a different description, which had nearly escaped him. 'Impossible; utterly impossible. Pray, consider what



is due to myself, my position,—Mrs. Granby,—my daughters. Why, only conceive, those sweet girls might actually see that wretched creature when they are taking their healthful exercise on the lawn! It is wholly out of the question that I should permit such a thing; and allow me to suggest, Miss Courtenay, with all due deference, that you are really making a mistake—a sad mistake, I may say—in allowing yourself to be occupied, in the smallest degree, about an individual of whose very existence, with that of all her class, you should properly be supposed to be ignorant.’

‘But the fact of her existence has been forced upon me in a way I cannot escape, Dr. Granby, even if I wished it, and with that, also, the certainty that she has an immortal soul, which is but too likely to perish for ever, if no one will even try to save her.’

‘Yes, I suppose—doubtless she has a soul,’ said Dr. Granby, as if giving a reluctant assent to a logical fact; ‘but it cannot be your concern, Miss Courtenay. Felons and murderers have souls, but you would not wish to interfere with their damnation—I mean, with their salvation—would you?’ Ernestine thought she should be only too glad if she could get the chance of trying. ‘No, no,’ continued the rector, ‘we must leave these things to the proper authorities.’

‘But who are the proper authorities in this case, Dr. Granby?’ said Ernestine, looking up quietly into his face. He shifted about uneasily in his chair.

‘Why, the—the Board of Guardians, or the Church Penitentiary Association, or, stay,’ he added, brightening up, ‘did you not say the girl had a father?’

‘Yes, but—’

‘Then he is the proper authority,’ exclaimed Dr. Granby, cutting her short triumphantly. ‘Let him be informed of his daughter’s disreputable proceedings, and let no one else interfere, far less a lady of your age and station in life, Miss Courtenay.’

Ernestine saw she need not waste any more time with the rector of St. Gregory, and she rose to go. Dr. Granby rose with alacrity also, but as she held out her hand to take leave, he took it in both his own, in the most paternal manner, and proceeded to expound a few more of his sentiments:—

‘I trust I need not assure you, my dear Miss Courtenay, that although I have permitted myself to give you a little advice, becoming, I may say, to my pastoral office and my friendly feeling towards yourself, I have no desire whatever to discourage your amiable philanthropy. Far from it. I only wish to direct your too ardent, too liberal zeal into proper channels. My

own daughters engage, at my desire, in works of charity, piety, and necessity. My sweet Louisa visits the infant-school once a week, and it is most cheering to see how she has taught the innocent little ones to clap their hands in unison ; while Maria, who is strikingly talented, and has a powerful voice, always leads our little choir in Term time, when several of the collegians assist at our services, and can appreciate our musical efforts. In works such as these, my dear Miss Courtenay, let me advise you to exercise your benevolent disposition, and you will find yourself benefiting your fellow-creatures without departing from the station in which Providence has placed you, and the usages of that society which you are so well fitted to adorn.' He finished off with a low bow and a wave of the white pocket-handkerchief, as if it had been a flag of truce, and Ernestine, quietly wishing him good morning, without attempting any further reply, left the house.

'And this man,' she thought, as she walked away—'this man is the representative and messenger of Him who came to seek and save the lost,—who took upon Him the form of a servant, who had not where to lay His head, who sat with publicans and sinners, who suffered the sinful woman to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with the hairs of her head !' Then she began

to think of the clergyman of the church to which Lady Beaufort had always taken her in London, and she felt that his opinion of her mission to Annie Brook would be very much the same as Dr. Granby's, and she wondered how it was that it had never before struck her, these were strange interpreters of the gospel that was to be preached to the poor and needy—the gospel of that Immaculate Love who came ‘to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised.’ The fact was, that Ernestine was now, unknown to herself, touching on the outskirts of the deep comprehensive truth—the lack of which had caused Lingard to make shipwreck of his faith—contained in these words, ‘If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;’—a truth underlying the very foundations of all real religion, and without which the loftiest creed, the fairest theories, are, and ever shall be, hollow and lifeless. The one impulse of loving pity, of active, unselfish charity, which had led her into this search for a lost sinner, was doing more to teach her the knowledge of God, and the truth of God, and the real nature of that atonement once made for the sins of the world, than all the theological instruction she had received from external sources in the whole course of her life.

Meantime, however, she went on to her hotel greatly disheartened. She was quite at a loss what to do next in her endeavour to find Annie Brook; but the very fact that all to whom she so much as mentioned the unhappy girl seemed straightway to harden their hearts against her, made her the more determined that she would never cease her efforts on her behalf, cost what it might.

Dinner with Mrs. Tompson was not enlivening. This aristocratically-minded lady, having completed her survey of the colleges for the day, was of opinion that Greyburgh was a very poor place indeed, dull and unfashionable. Why, it was nothing compared even to such towns as Bath or Leamington; there, one could at least find tolerable shops, and it was possible to meet one's friends on the parades; but the principal street of Greyburgh, which the guide pretended was worth seeing, why, really it was no promenade at all. There was hardly an elegant toilette to be seen. Perhaps if Mrs. Tompson had owned all the truth, she would have admitted that the most lady-like person she had observed, in her opinion, was a certain Don sailing down the street in his scarlet gown.

Ernestine went back early in the evening to her brother. She found him asleep. The nurse thought either that his composing-draught had been more potent

than usual, or that Ernestine's visit in the morning had soothed him to a certain extent, as he seldom slept so long or so quietly. Ernestine stood looking at him in silence for some moments. It was a sleep so like to death ! He lay perfectly motionless, the marble whiteness of his face brought out in strong relief, by the heavy masses of dark hair that hung round it, and the black eyelashes lying without a quiver on his wan cheek. She could almost have believed, as she gazed on him, that the mighty change had passed over him, and that his closed eyes had already looked into the tremendous mysteries which all the generations that have ever lived have sought in vain to penetrate on this side of the grave ; his lips seemed locked in that inexorable silence which has ever baffled the living, and held back from them the knowledge that endues with awful wisdom each little babe that has sighed its feeble breath away ere well it has learned to live ; while each line of the exhausted form seemed to imply that it only waited now to sink into the earth, with the cold insensibility to all that is most repugnant to it, which so surely marks the lifeless clay. If it were so—then were the ultimate state of that pale sleeper fixed irrevocably—the soul stamped with the seal that through the incomprehensible For Ever was to define unchang-

ingly the conditions of his being. But, no! that faint, scarce perceptible, heaving of the breast, that little tremor of breath moving over the white lips, was the barrier, immovable as the laws which guide the stars in their courses, that shut from him the teeming immensity of the unseen, and held him bound to this visible life of brief probation. How frail a barrier! How tremendous the step beyond! Yet not one faint gleam of the coming revelation dawned with ever so pale a light upon those living eyes; that and that alone which he had made himself in his twenty little years of transient existence, he still must be till the last faint sigh of that gasping breath goes forth, and then—God face to face! all mystery, all doubt, all shadow destroyed in the light of His presence—the illimitable universe disclosed—death and the world behind him—infinity above, below, around—and immortality, fixed in the mould which he himself prepared for it in the life of earth, settling down upon his being, in its changeless power. Long did Ernestine stand watching him, as she thought on these things; but at last, with a sigh of disquietude and unrest, she turned away to seek some change from thoughts that seemed too weighty for her soul.

Nurse Berry had taken her knitting into the other room, where the waning light still lingered, and sat

near the open door, so that she might perceive at once if her patient awoke. Ernestine went and sat down on a low stool at her side, looking up with a sense of rest into the kind motherly face, and listened gratefully to the homely tones which asked if she had had 'a good time' out of doors. The necessity for independent action, and for an unwonted degree of exposure to the rough ways of the world, had given Ernestine that longing for some sort of loving protection and shelter, which usually overtakes a woman thus situated, and she felt as if she should have liked to lay down her tired head on the good woman's lap, as she used to do when her own old nurse still lived to make her childhood safe and happy.

'Indeed, I have not had a good time at all,' she said, 'for I have been very much disappointed.'

'And how was that, my dear lady?'

It occurred to Ernestine that it was possible the nurse might be able to advise her how to proceed in the task that seemed to grow every hour more difficult. Looking up eagerly, she said—

'I was disappointed because I could get no help where I hoped for it; but, nurse, now I think of it, perhaps you yourself could help me.'

'I shall be very pleased, ma'am,' said the nurse,



smiling down upon the sweet eyes which had quite won her heart already, 'what be I to do?'

'I will tell you,' said Ernestine. 'I want so much to find a poor young girl, who has been deserted in Greyburgh, and I do not know in the least where to find her.'

'Is she one of them unfortunates?' said the nurse, making use of the technical phrase, which to the more inexperienced of that unhappy class has too often afforded a palliation for undeniable sin.

'Yes, unfortunate indeed; because she is so guilty,' said Ernestine.

'Ah! there be a many such in this here place,' said the nurse, shaking her head sadly. 'It often gives me a sore heart to see young things, no better than children, starting in their gay dresses of a winter night; but, ma'am, if you'll excuse me for saying it, bad as they are, I do think those university gentlemen that encourage them are worse. They ought to know better, with their learning, and their money, and their fine manners. It do seem a shocking thing that they should go ruining simple young girls, body and soul, just for their own wicked pleasure.'

'It is shocking beyond all words, nurse; you cannot think worse of these men than I do.'

'And to see how grand and proud they hold them-

selves all the time, counting even respectable poor people as dust under their feet; and as to the poor girls they ruin—why, when once they've cast them off, they'd dare them so much as to look near them, or make game of them for being what they've made them! I remember a poor child I knew about—she was but fourteen—a pretty, modest little maid, and she was servant at a lodging-house, where one of these fine college gentlemen had rooms. Well, he set himself to ruin her, and she too young and silly to know what she was about. So, when it was found out, she was turned off from her place at once, though they kept the fine gentleman in his rooms. She went home to her mother, but her stepfather shut the door in her face, and would not suffer her mother so much as to know what became of her. She wandered about starving for a few days, and then one of these wicked women who keep disreputable lodging-houses in the town got hold of her, and drove her out on the streets to get her bread by wickedness. Well, ma'am, one evening I was walking down the street, and I saw her coming along—looking so childish and simple, even in her flaunting dress—and I saw her meet this gentleman. She had not seen him since she had got turned out of doors for his sake. She stood stock-still, grew white as death, and

then gazed up in his face with such a beseeching look ; as if she wanted him to save her out of the life he had brought her to. He just half-stopt for a moment, and looked at her from head to foot, and then burst out into such a wicked, mocking laugh—I think the devil himself must have taught it to him—and said in a jeering tone : “ So that’s what you have come to, is it ? ” He pointed her out to the gentleman he was walking with, and then pushed past her ; and they went down the street together laughing and sneering. The child looked after them for a moment, and then dashed up her hands, and began running as fast as she could towards the bridge. I was afraid she might mean to do as too many of them does ; and perhaps she did mean it, and was scared when she saw the water ; but, when I got up to her as fast as I could, she was standing at the parapet, leaning her face down on the stone, and beating her hands against it, as if she wanted to hurt them. I put my arm round her, and said,—“ What is it, my dear ? ” and she seemed as if she must tell out her trouble, though she never saw me in her life before ; for she cried out, “ O ma’am ! I met him, and he laughed at me ! He laughed at me for being what I am ; and who but he brought me to it—who but he brought me to it ? ”

‘And what became of the poor thing?’ said Ernestine, with tears in her eyes.

‘A clergyman I knew got her into a penitentiary, when I told him about her, and she is burying her days there still, and she not sixteen yet.’

‘It is too dreadful,’ said Ernestine; ‘how it makes one think of the great God looking down on such deeds!’

‘Ah! that’s true, ma’am! I think of that many a time; we shall know the rights of these things when we go to stand before Him;’ and involuntarily Ernestine shuddered. ‘But about this girl you want to find, ma’am; do you know her name?’

‘Yes; her name is Annie Brook. I know that much, and no more. I have never even seen her.’

‘Indeed. Then I fear it won’t be easy for you to find her among so many; but I’ll tell you what to do, ma’am: you ask Mr. Thorold to help you, and he’ll find her for you if any one can.’

‘And who is Mr. Thorold?’

‘The clergyman who got the poor child I told you of into the penitentiary. He is sure to find her out if she is in the town. He is always among thieves and lost women.’

‘Always among thieves?’ said Ernestine, looking up surprised.

‘Yes, to try and do them good. He is at it night and day in all the most blackguard places in the town. I said to him once—for you see, ma’am, I nursed him through a fever he caught from a poor beggar who died of it, so I makes free with him—I said I did wonder he spent himself among these awful bad characters, that seemed as if nothing could make them any better—convicts, and drunkards, and tramps going to gaol with canvas bags on.’

‘With canvas bags on!’ said Ernestine, looking bewildered.

‘Yes, ma’am. When they tear up their rags in the work’us to get new ones, the master just cuts a hole in a sack, and puts their heads through it, and they are sent off to prison in it. Well, it is these, and others like them, both men and women, that Mr. Thorold is always trying to teach and to help; and when I said to him I thought there was such little chance of ever getting one of them out of their bad ways, it seemed a pity he should wear himself out on them, he said, says he: “That’s the very reason why I do it, nurse. Every one else has given them up, and I like to be the friend of those who have got no other in this world. People say they are hopeless characters, and there is nothing more to be done for them but to leave them to take

their own course to hell ; but you may depend on it," says he, "that's not the way the Father in heaven deals with us. He never gives any one up, be they ever so bad, to the very last moment of their lives ; there is never a soul so lost or so dead but His grace can reach it ; nor a heart so cold in despair but His pity can comfort it."

'Oh, I like that !' exclaimed Ernestine, her eyes kindling.

'Ah, I have thought of his words many times,' said the nurse, 'when I have heard folks talking of those they thought hardened in vice.'

'And you think Mr. Thorold would help me ?'

'He'd be more than glad, ma'am ; it is just meat and drink to him to help those that are friendless and lost, like the girl you are looking for.'

'And how can I see him ?'

'Well, if you did not mind, you might see him now ; for I know where he is at this hour. He holds a night-school for boys down a lane not far from here ; and he would speak to you there in a moment, if you liked to go. My daughter is down stairs waiting for me, and she shall show you the way if you like.'

'Do you think I might ? Is it not too late ?' said Ernestine, looking doubtfully at the window, where the

shades of evening were gathering, though it was by no means dark.

‘Well, ma’am, that’s as you think. As for Mr. Thorold, he never thinks what hour it is. I don’t believe he knows day from night, for he seems to me always at work; he is as often as not up at night with the dying, and I am sure he never rests by day.’

‘While I am letting some wretched fear of infringing conventionalities stand in the way of saving a soul!’ thought Ernestine. ‘I will go at once,’ she said, starting up. ‘I hope my brother will not wake till I return.’

‘I don’t think he will, ma’am,’ said the nurse; ‘he is very still, poor lamb.’

And in another moment Ernestine found herself traversing some small narrow streets, with old-fashioned houses rising on either side, which grew more and more crowded with wretched-looking people, till she reached a parish school-house. This building, her guide told her, was lent to Mr. Thorold every evening for his ‘wild boys;’ and wild enough they certainly seemed, as the open door of a large room revealed a throng of such street Arabs as had never met her eyes before. Uncombed and unwashed, they seemed to Ernestine the most absolutely hopeless of possible recipients of learning; yet all were

busy under the superintendence of Mr. Thorold, who came forward at once after receiving a whispered communication from the nurse's daughter. He was a tall man, apparently about five-and-thirty, wearing a rough great-coat, which had seen its best days, with bushy black hair pushed carelessly back from his forehead, strongly marked eyebrows, which almost hid his keen dark eyes, a sallow complexion, and an expression of great firmness and determination. Ernestine was both surprised and pleased to see that it was a young man in an undergraduate's gown whom he called to take his place while he left the room ; her impression of the younger university men had not been such as to lead her to expect any of them to take an interest in a night-school for ragged boys.

Mr. Thorold came up to her, and bowing, without a word he opened the door of a small room, which was unoccupied, and placed a chair for her. He did not sit down himself, but stood leaning against the wall, waiting for her to speak. Ernestine remembered her interview with Dr. Granby, and thought that never in her life had she seen a greater contrast than between those two ecclesiastics ; but she felt no difficulty in stating her wishes to this business-like cleric. He heard her to the end, then asked a few rapid questions as to the extent



of her knowledge of the girl, with the somewhat brusque manner which seemed habitual to him; and after a moment's thought, said decisively—

‘I believe your only chance of finding her is in the gaol.’ Ernestine gave a start of surprise. ‘Does that alarm you?’ he said, a smile lighting up his dark face.

‘Not for myself; but I have no reason to think Annie Brook dishonest, or anything of that sort.’

‘That has nothing to do with it,’ he said quickly. ‘There is a peculiar sort of police-discipline in this place, which enables the college authorities to commit women of this unhappy class to gaol for certain short periods. We have that much of real Christianity in the universities, that the deadly crime which the law does not recognise as such at all, is at least punishable here.’

‘And do you think it does these miserable women any good to be sent to prison?’ asked Ernestine.

‘Not as a punishment; the periods for which they are imprisoned are too short, and no care is taken to make it morally beneficial to them; they are all herded together, with every incitement to try and emulate one another in recklessness and bravado. But it is of incalculable use, as being the one only opportunity which

their lives afford of bringing good influences to bear upon them, and offering them the means of reformation, if they can be induced to accept them. They are so guarded by the wretches who keep the houses where they congregate, that it is next to impossible to gain a hearing from them outside, but in the gaol they cannot escape; they must see the chaplain, or any one else who may try to benefit them; and this imprisonment has been the means of saving many.'

'One would think it ought to save all,' said Ernestine eagerly. 'Surely when they are actually there, in the very hands of those who would help them, not one should be allowed to go back to their dreadful life.'

Mr. Thorold shook his head. 'You little know the trammels that bind them, and besides, it is not easy to find persons who have both the will and the capacity for such a mission as that. It has been found that the chaplain alone cannot do it, for many reasons. It requires the help of a woman, at once wise and gentle, and there is no lady at present who is able to undertake it.'

'And are there many imprisoned?'

'In Term time there are often from twenty to thirty. I only wish,' he added, clenching his hand, 'that the university police would administer a somewhat more

even justice, and imprison the men, who are a hundred-fold more guilty than these wretched women.'

'I am very glad to hear you say so,' said Ernestine, 'for I cannot understand the received code of opinion on that subject at all. You think, then, that I may find Annie Brook in the prison?'

'It is possible,—in any case, you are likely to get some clue to her. You say you have a portrait of her; I advise you to take it with you, and show it to the governor of the gaol; it is very possible he may recognise it; if not, ask him to show it to the women imprisoned there, and if he is careful not to say for what purpose he does so, they will be sure at least to betray the name by which she goes at present; these girls scarcely ever retain their own name.'

'But would they not be glad to tell all they knew of her to those who wished to help her?'

'Not if they thought there was any intention of persuading her to reform.'

'How very strange! I should have thought that, however lost and wretched they might be, they would retain enough of humanity to be glad that a companion should be saved out of misery like their own.'

'I fear it is a principle of human nature to feel it a relief to have companions in guilt, and to dread repent-

ance in others, lest it awaken personal uneasiness of conscience. But there is a stronger motive in the case of these poor girls: the good people who have established "Refuges" and "Homes" for those who repent, have succeeded in making them so repellent and intolerable to them, that I believe they consider themselves to be performing an act of common humanity when they try to prevent any from being persuaded to enter them.'

At this moment a considerable degree of noise was heard from the next room, and Mr. Thorold went hurriedly to the door.

'My populace is becoming clamorous,' he said; 'I must go.'

'But pray tell me,' said Ernestine, 'how am I to gain admission to the gaol?'

'You must have an order from a magistrate. I will get one for you, if you will tell me your name.'

'You do not know my name?' said Ernestine, looking up with a smile of amusement.

'How should I?'

'True; I was only thinking how surprised my aunt, who regulates most of my proceedings, would be if she knew I had been talking to you as I have done, without your so much as knowing my name.'

He shrugged his shoulders. ‘These abstruse etiquettes of society are quite beyond me—I cannot away with them. Life is too short and too solemn to be clogged with such trammels as these. If you want to save a soul, and I am willing to help you, what can it signify to me whether you are a duchess or a dairymaid, or to you who I am, if you have reason to believe I am neither a ruffian nor an impostor?’

‘I quite agree with you,’ said Ernestine, laughing; ‘and my aunt is not here to argue the point with you. My name is Ernestine Courtenay; and I am so much obliged to you for your kindness.’ He smiled as he looked keenly and searchingly at her for a moment, and then, having arranged that he was to bring the order to her brother’s rooms next day, he opened the door for her, and she passed out into the dark streets with her guide.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### REGINALD.

REGINALD still lay in his deathlike sleep. Ernestine had decided to watch by him herself, at least for this night, that she might judge of his state more fully; and Mrs. Berry, after hearing, with great satisfaction, that Mr. Thorold had proved quite as helpful as she had prophesied, took her leave, promising to return early in the morning. Ernestine sat down by her brother's side, feeling that she could with a free heart give him her undivided attention, now that a hopeful step had at last been taken on behalf of Annie Brook. But while he slept, her thoughts flew away to the one who was dearer to her than even the dying brother, or than all the world beside,—the one to whom she had given the love that can be felt but once in a lifetime, and which it is a terrible thing to feel on this earth at all; for the exceeding preciousness with which it invests one perishable human being, to whom each day brings the chance of sickness and death, sorrow and

danger, makes such a love an agony rather than a blessing. They who so love must ever drink deeply of the cup of trembling; but at times there will arise in their hearts a nameless terror, a sickening anxiety for the future, whose brightness all depends on this one cherished treasure, which often proves a foreboding of some real anguish looming in the distant hours. It was so on this night with Ernestine Courtenay. She did not wonder that, in the darkness of the quiet sick-room, her heart seemed to go out to Hugh Lingard with a tenderness almost mournful in its depth; it was often so when she was parted from him, but on this occasion she was oppressed by a vague yet most painful feeling that she had somehow separated herself from him to a certain degree,—that she had begun to raise a barrier between them which would ultimately shut him out from her for ever. She argued with herself on the unreasonableness of such shadowy fears. It was with his full consent that she had come to Greyburgh. She was going to write to him the next day, as she had promised, with a detail of all she had done as yet in her mission. The very last words they had said to each other had been to arrange that their marriage should take place in the course of a few months. Yet, do what she would, her spirits sunk under the weight of an

undefined conviction, that she had entered on a path which by some means would lead her far away from the one being to whom she clung with all a woman's passionate devotion.

She was roused from her dark thoughts by Reginald, who suddenly started out of his heavy sleep with a cry of indescribable terror. He flung out his arms, beating the air with his helpless hands, while his large black eyes opened to their fullest extent, and gazed into the darkness with a vacant stare.

‘Not yet—not yet,’ he shrieked out. ‘No! I cannot go—I cannot. Help, O help me!’

In a moment Ernestine was kneeling at his side with her arms clasped round him. ‘Reginald, darling, what is it? There is no one here but me, Ernestine, your sister. Look at me, dearest; don’t be afraid.’

His hands fell on her shoulders, the wildness passed from his eyes, and he looked down at her with returning consciousness; but she could feel his whole frame trembling from head to foot. ‘Ernie,’ he said, in a hoarse whisper, ‘is the dreadful hour come? Must I go? Is this death?’ and he literally shuddered.

‘No, my darling,’ she said soothingly, ‘you are only faint; let me give you some wine; you will be better presently.’



She made him swallow some wine and then bathed his hands and temples with eau-de-cologne, till gradually the spasm of terror passed from his blanched face, and, falling back in his chair, he gave a heavy sigh, half of relief and half of remembered agony.

‘Then it is still to come?’ he murmured. ‘Almost I could wish that first bitterness of death at least were past; yet no,’ he continued, his features contracting with pain, ‘anything—anything rather than that; better life, though it be torture, than the blackness of eternal night.’

It was on Ernestine’s lips to ask why death was so dreadful to him. It was not so to her, though the love that brightened earth for her might make her sad to leave it yet awhile; and why should this boy, who once had loved to lose himself in glowing dreams of the consummation of bliss, now so shrink from that which was but the gate of immortality? But she remembered her promise to ask no questions, and, besides, he was still too much agitated to risk further disturbance, so she soothed him gently for a time, talking to him on indifferent subjects till gradually he became calm, and his eyes brightened as he turned them on her sweet face.

‘You are a good nurse, my darling Ernie,’ he said. ‘I feel now as if I could almost enjoy this night,

with you sitting at my side. Your voice is just like music.'

'I am so glad you are more comfortable,' she said, laying her head on the pillow beside him. 'We shall have such a nice quiet time. Now, you must tell me what you would like to talk about.'

'Shall I really?' he said, caressingly. 'May I choose the subject?'

'Of course. What am I here for but to be your slave?'

'Well, you remember how you used to tell me stories long ago, when we were children, though I used to consider you almost a grown-up lady, because you were four years older. I want you to do the same for me to-night. I want you to tell me all the histories you can remember of those who have gone to death calmly and fearlessly, though they had been compelled to face it in all its horrible certainty for some time previously.'

'What! beginning with Socrates and his poison-cup?'

'If you will; and tell me about that criminal, I forget his name, who, on the scaffold, thought neither of the shame nor the agony, but said only, "Now I shall learn the great secret."'

'And Julian the Apostate, who died saying, "O

Galilean, thou hast conquered,"' said Ernestine, lifting her head that she might look into her brother's eyes as she spoke.

A sudden flush dyed his pale face. 'As you please,' he answered shortly, and then went on: 'Who was it that said, "Death cannot be an evil, because it is universal"?'

'That was Goethe. But, darling,' said Ernestine softly, 'would it not be happiest of all to speak of the only true Conqueror over death—the One who took its sting away, and made the grave no strange place for any one of us since HE has lain in it?'

'No, no!' exclaimed Reginald, starting up with a vehemence which seemed greater than his feeble frame could bear, 'Ernie, do not speak to me of Him. I cannot bear it—I cannot. I tell you I will not. You will kill me if you speak of Him; rather go and leave me quite alone.'

'My dearest Reggie, I will not touch on any subject you do not like. Lie down again, and trust me I will only tell you what you ask,—the histories, so far as I remember them, of brave men dying calmly and without fear;' and in a low gentle tone, as she would have soothed a wearied child, she spoke to him of those who have been seen to go down with fearless steps into the valley of the shadow of death; and of others, who being

rescued from it, had spoken of a lovely pure light into which they seemed to sink, with echoes of softest music in their ears; and Reginald listened with her hand clasped in his, and grew very calm and still; and so the night wore peacefully on for both, till the faint glimmer of the far-off dawn stole into the sky, and the cool breath of the morning passed lightly over the wearied eyelids of the dying man, while, half-sleeping, half-waking, he lay gazing dreamily out upon the shifting shadows of the heavens. Then Ernestine relapsed into silence, and, with her head still laid beside her brother's, followed unconsciously the train of thought which that strange unearthly night suggested to her. The actual life of the present seemed so intangible, so fleeting, with all its briefness and uncertainty, that she felt as if no soul could ever seek in it to slake its thirst for joy and for existence, and in spirit she passed over the dark valley of which she had been speaking, into the realms of changeless light, where there is no shadow, no perplexity, no fear; and she thought what glorious bliss, what sweetest rest, it would be to dwell in that deathless land with him, her dearest loved,—with this poor wayward brother also, and with that other one for whom her heart still yearned,—gathered all together at the feet of Infinite Compassion. And so she lost herself in those

sweet visions, till, with a smile, she woke to see that what appeared to her but the baseless fancies of her own deep longing, was, after all, the very reality which God has prepared for those that love Him.

At last the first sunbeam smote on the wan face of Reginald, and another day had begun for him who had so few to number now, and soon all unearthly thoughts were put to flight for both of them by the arrival of Nurse Berry, with all her homely arrangements for their comfort. She insisted especially that Ernestine should now go to the hotel to take a few hours' rest, and Reginald urged her to do so, with many loving thanks for the comfort she had been to him that night; so that she agreed to their wishes, promising to return in the course of the afternoon.

When Ernestine woke up later in the day from her needful rest, she found Mrs. Tompson in a state of considerable excitement. Dr. and Mrs. Granby had come to call on Miss Courtenay, and, finding that she could not be disturbed, had paid their visit to the chaperon. In the course of it they dropped various mysterious hints, that they feared Miss Courtenay's charitable zeal was carrying her beyond the *convenances* of society, and that they wished much she would place herself under their protection and guidance during her

stay in a place where reticence of all sorts was so much required as in Greyburgh. These remarks Mrs. Tompson repeated with much unctiousness, beseeching Ernestine to take them into serious consideration; but she, inwardly shuddering at the thought of placing herself under Dr. Granby's care, and of the aristocratic uselessness which would be the result, assured Mrs. Tompson she was quite satisfied with her chaperonage; and added, that in Reginald's precarious state she did not intend to see the Granbys, or any other acquaintance at all. She begged her chaperon, however, to accept all Mrs. Granby's invitations to dinner, etc., for herself, and finally reminding her that there was only one person to whom she owed any account of her actions, she pointed to the letter ready sealed for the post, which lay on the table, addressed to Mr. Lingard, and assured her it contained a detail of all her proceedings since she left him. With this Mrs. Tompson was fain to be content, and Ernestine hurried back as soon as she could to Reginald, for her uneasiness with regard to his mental condition increased every hour, and her great fear now was lest he should die with this dark burden, whatever it might be, unrevealed and unrelieved.

She had not long been in her place by his side when the nurse came to tell her that Mr. Thorold was waiting

for her in the next room. She went in, and found him walking up and down, somewhat after the fashion of a wild beast in a cage, but he turned to meet Ernestine with a frankness and simplicity which set her at ease at once.

‘I have brought your order,’ he said, ‘and I have persuaded the magistrate to give you one containing a general permission to visit the female prisoners, as it would not have answered your purpose to have it made out to any person in particular. I have had to fight a small battle on your behalf,’ he added, with a smile; ‘the conscientious magistrate would not grant you the order till he could satisfy himself that you had no intention of teaching these poor women Popery, or Puritanism, or various other distinctive forms of religion which he enumerated. I told him I knew little of you, but a great deal of the wretched prisoners; and that, whilst I had no reason to suppose the study of doctrinal theology formed any part of your intentions towards them, I was so certain that they, for the most part, did not realize the existence of a God or a future state, that I doubted its taking any serious effect on them if you did.’

‘But do you mean that he would actually have refused me entrance to the gaol on such a ground as that? I could understand a fear of erroneous doctrine being in-

troduced into the minds of high-principled, well-educated persons, but surely, in the case of women living, as you say, in utter ignorance of the very foundations of religion, and in gross violation of the plainest laws of God, it is not possible that he would let them miss any practical good I might be able to do them for so chimerical a fear?’

‘It is not only possible,’ said Thorold, ‘but it is this same senseless fear which has shut the doors of our gaols and workhouses all over the country to the only persons who would care to try and help the unhappy inmates; it would be inconceivable, if it were not true; but the pig-headedness of British magistrates and guardians of the poor is something wonderful!’ He said this with such hearty vehemence, that Ernestine could not help laughing.

‘And are the poor convicts and paupers never allowed to see any one, then?’ she asked.

‘O yes! any ill-conditioned, disreputable person of their own rank, who chooses to call himself a friend, is quite welcome, at least in the workhouses, to go and revive all their associations with evil, and their longing to return to former bad habits. I will give you a true case in point, which came under my own notice: A poor girl was dying in one of the most infamous houses in the



town. A lady whom she had herself sent for, and who had won her love most completely by her gentle kindness, was very anxious that her last hours should not be spent in a place where she heard and saw nothing but the worst of evil night and day. The only shelter to which she could be removed was the workhouse, and the lady begged her for her soul's sake to consent to go there. The girl had the usual horror of this last home of the poor, but she could not resist the loving counsels of the first person who had ever told her of a Saviour. She agreed to go, but on the one condition, that the lady should promise faithfully to visit her there as often as possible. This she gladly did, never dreaming of any difficulty which could stand in her way; and the poor creature, to whom her pure influence was bringing light and peace, was carried off to the workhouse. The next day she went to see her, and was refused admission at the gate; the porter roughly telling her it was the guardians' order that no lady should be admitted. You may imagine her distress, knowing the girl must suppose she had forgotten her promise. The lady had powerful friends, however, and she set them to work to obtain a special order of admission for her, which, after a fortnight of tedious delays she obtained. She went to the gate, and was told the poor girl had died the day before.'

‘O how sad!’ exclaimed Ernestine.

‘Yes, but you have not heard the sting of the story yet. During the whole of that fortnight the wretched woman who kept the house whence the girl had been rescued was allowed to visit her daily, and to amuse her dying hours with such conversation as you have never dreamt of.’

‘That is indeed inconceivable,’ said Ernestine; ‘I could not have believed it.’

‘You see the lady might have been a High Church-woman or an Evangelical, whereas the woman they admitted was only one of the vilest reprobates that ever disgraced her sex, and slew her thousands and ten thousands of living souls; but this is a subject which makes me rabid, so I must not go on. Here is your order, and you will not teach the prisoners Zuinglianism or Universalism, or any other “ism,” will you?’

‘No, I think not,’ said Ernestine, laughing; ‘I don’t feel very competent to teach them anything; it will all be very strange to me at the gaol; I hope I shall not make any blunders. Is the governor a very fierce individual?’

‘He is sharp enough to the prisoners, but he is likely to be very amiable to you, I should think. He is an old-man, who has been thirty years a “servant of the

city," as he terms it, and is probably the last remaining specimen of a race of gaolers that is almost obsolete. He is as different as well can be from the cold, stern, gentlemanlike officials who are to be found in such positions now. He has no pretensions to being a gentleman. He is very talkative; speaks with the broad Greyburgh accent, and gives his views on all subjects with the most uncompromising plainness; but he does his practical duties so well that the authorities cannot find an excuse for considering him superannuated, as they wish.'

'And is there a matron for the women?' asked Ernestine.

'His wife, old Mrs. Bolton, acts as such. She has all his roughness, without his sound good sense.'

'Ernestine, can you come to me for a moment?' said the faint voice of Reginald from the next room. She started up, and begged Mr. Thorold to wait a few minutes, while she hastily obeyed the call. The door stood wide open, so that Thorold could see and hear all that passed. Reginald, it seemed, wished to be moved nearer to the window. He wanted air, he said, and, leaning heavily on Ernestine, he began to walk feebly towards it. But her strength was not equal to the weight of his almost helpless frame, and seeing her begin to totter

under it, Thorold started up, and, without a word, lifted Reginald in his strong arms, and placed him on the couch, near the window. Then, as both brother and sister thanked him, he answered in a low, soft tone, which sounded peculiarly soothing, and proceeded to smooth Reginald's pillows, and make various little arrangements for his comfort, with a tenderness which astonished Ernestine, who had thought him somewhat rough and brusque in manner previously. Reginald looked up with a grateful smile, and as Thorold shook hands with him before leaving the room, began a sentence, 'Will you—' then suddenly checked himself and said no more. Thorold took no notice of the half-formed speech, but with a few words of sympathy for his evident illness, made way for the nurse, who had just come in, and went into the outer room with Ernestine.

'You have a great sorrow there,' he said in a low tone.

'Oh, you cannot think how great,' replied Ernestine, her eyes filling with tears. 'It is not only that he is dying, as you perceive, but it is such a sad passing from this world. He gives me no clue to his state of mind, yet I see that these his last days are one long unrest, and I hardly know whether he hates life or dreads death most.'

The gravity of Thorold's face deepened almost to sternness. 'Were his associates among the reading men or those of the wilder set?' he asked.

'Always among the reading men, till lately. He intended to take holy orders, and gave himself up almost entirely to the study of divinity, but Dr. Compton tells me that he altered very much last term, and led a kind of life I should have thought impossible for Reginald. I never had dreaded the ordinary temptations of this place for him.'

'There are intellectual as well as moral dangers in Greyburgh now, and it is more than likely it is to these he has succumbed. But I must not stay. If I can be of use to you in any way, let me know, and I will come at once.'

He did not wait for her thanks, but went hurriedly away.

'How do you come to know Thorold, Ernestine?' said Reginald, when she went back to him.

She explained that she had gone to ask his assistance respecting a poor person in whom she was interested. 'And do you know him?' she asked in return.

'Not personally; but I have often been at his church. He is not an attractive man to most people, but I had, and indeed still have, the greatest admiration for his

character. I never knew any one with such indomitable faith, such stern self-denial, and such entire devotion of heart and soul to the one cause in which he believes. Thorold has stood like a rock through all the whirlwinds and storms that have been raging through the university of late, casting men's minds into chaos, and making shipwreck of their peace.'

'Is he a man of influence here?' asked Ernestine.

'With all who really know him; but he is excessively quiet and unobtrusive. He lives entirely in and for his work, at which he toils like a slave; but if ever any one seeks his help in difficulties, of whatever nature, he is ready at once with the most fearless counsels. I have several times been on the point of going to him myself, and then I have thought better, or worse of it. And now, Ernie, I must try to sleep, for I am tired;' and he lay back with so evident a wish to stop the conversation, that she made no attempt to continue it.

END OF VOL. I.













